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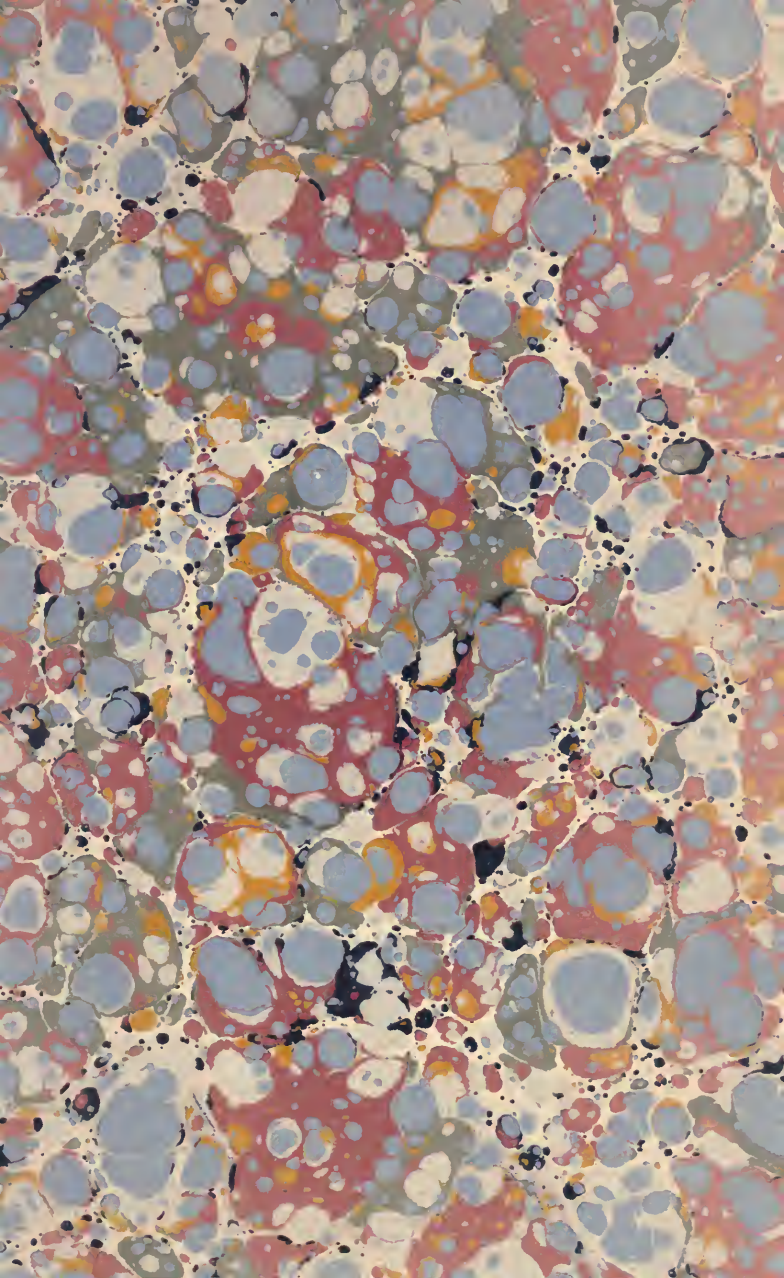

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RANALD ATTACKED BY HIS SCHOOLMATES.

Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood

BY

GEORGE MAC DONALD

Author of "At the Back of the North Wind" "A Rough Shaking" "The Princess and the Goblin" "Gutta-Percha Willie" &c.

WITH THIRTY-SIX ILLUSTRATIONS BY ARTHUR HUGHES AND COVER-DESIGN BY LAURENCE HOUSMAN

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RANALD BANNERMAN'S BOYHOOD.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

I DO not intend to carry my story one month beyond the hour when I saw that my boyhood was gone and my youth arrived; a period determined to some by the first tail-coat, to me by a different sign. My reason for wishing to tell this first portion of my history is, that when I look back upon it, it seems to me not only so pleasant, but so full of meaning, that, if I can only tell it right, it must prove rather

pleasant and not quite unmeaning to those who will read it. It will prove a very poor story to such as care only for stirring adventures, and like them all the better for a pretty strong infusion of the impossible; but those to whom their own history is interesting—to whom, young as they may be, it is a pleasant thing to be in the world—will not, I think, find the experience of a boy born in a very different position from that of most of them, yet as much a boy as any of them, wearisome because ordinary.

If I did not mention that I, Ranald Bannerman, am a Scotchman, I should be found out before long by the kind of thing I have to tell; for although England and Scotland are in all essentials one, there are such differences between them that one could tell at once, on opening his eyes, if he had been carried out of the one into the other during the night. I do not mean he might not be puzzled, but except there was an intention to puzzle him by a skilful selection of place, the very air, the very colours would tell him; or if he kept his eyes shut, his ears would tell him without his eyes. But I will not offend fastidious ears with any syllable of my rougher tongue. I will tell my story in English, and neither part of the country will like it the worse for that.

I will clear the way for it by mentioning that my father was the clergyman of a country parish in the north of Scotland—a humble position, involving plain living and plain ways altogether. There was a glebe

or church-farm attached to the manse or clergyman's house, and my father rented a small farm besides, for he needed all he could make by farming to supplement the smallness of the living. My mother was an invalid as far back as I can remember. We were four boys, and had no sister. But I must begin at the beginning, that is, as far back as it is possible for me to begin.

CHAPTER II.

THE GLIMMER OF TWILIGHT.

I CANNOT tell any better than most of my readers how and when I began to come awake, or what it was that wakened me. I mean, I cannot remember when I began to remember, or what first got set down in my memory as worth remembering. Sometimes I fancy it must have been a tremendous flood that first made me wonder, and so made me begin to remember. At all events, I do remember one flood that seems about as far off as anything—the rain pouring so thick that I put out my hand in front of me to try whether I could see it through the veil of the falling water. The river, which in general was to be seen only in glimpses from the house—for it ran at the bottom of a hollow—was outspread like a sea in front, and stretched away far on either hand. It was a little stream, but it fills so much of my memory with its regular recurrence of autumnal floods, that I can have no confidence that one of these is in reality the oldest thing I remember. Indeed, I have a suspicion that my oldest memories are of dreams,—where or when dreamed, the good One

who made me only knows. They are very vague to me now, but were almost all made up of bright things. One only I can recall, and it I will relate, or more properly describe, for there was hardly anything done in it. I dreamed it often. It was of the room I slept in, only it was narrower in the dream, and loftier, and the window was gone. But the ceiling was a ceiling indeed; for the sun, moon, and stars lived there. The sun was not a scientific sun at all, but one such as you see in penny picture-books — a round, jolly, jocund man's face, with flashes of yellow frilling it all about, just what a grand sunflower would look if you set a countenance where the black seeds are. And the moon was just such a one as you may see the cow jumping over in the pictured nursery rhyme. She was a crescent, of course, that she might have a face drawn in the hollow, and turned towards the sun, who seemed to be her husband. He looked merrily at her, and she looked trustfully at him, and I knew that they got on very well together. The stars were their children, of course, and they seemed to run about the ceiling just as they pleased; but the sun and the moon had regular motions — rose and set at the proper times, for they were steady old folks. I do not, however, remember ever seeing them rise or set; they were always up and near the centre before the dream dawned on me. It would always come in one way: I thought I awoke in the middle of the night, and lo! there was the room with the sun and the moon and the stars at their

pranks and revels in the ceiling — Mr. Sun nodding and smiling across the intervening space to Mrs. Moon, and she nodding back to him with a knowing look, and the corners of her mouth drawn down. I have vague memories of having heard them talk. At times I feel as if I could yet recall something of what they said, but it vanishes the moment I try to catch it. It was very queer talk, indeed — about me, I fancied— but a thread of strong sense ran through it all. When the dream had been very vivid, I would sometimes think of it in the middle of the next day, and look up to the sun, saying to myself: He 's up there now, busy enough. I wonder what he is seeing to talk to his wife about when he comes down at night? I think it sometimes made me a little more careful of my conduct. When the sun set, I thought he was going in the back way; and when the moon rose, I thought she was going out for a little stroll until I should go to sleep, when they might come and talk about me again. It was odd that, although I never fancied it of the sun, I thought I could make the moon follow me as I pleased. I remember once my eldest brother giving me great offence by bursting into laughter, when I offered, in all seriousness, to bring her to the other side of the house where they wanted light to go on with something they were about. But I must return to my dream; for the most remarkable thing in it I have not yet told you. In one corner of the ceiling there was a hole, and through that hole came down a

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LITTLE RANALD'S DREAM.

ladder of sun-rays—very bright and lovely. Where it came from I never thought, but of course it could not come from the sun, because there he was, with his bright coat off, playing the father of his family in the most homely Old-English-gentleman fashion possible. That it was a ladder of rays there could, however, be no doubt: if only I could climb upon it! I often tried, but fast as I lifted my feet to climb, down they came again upon the boards of the floor. At length I did succeed, but this time the dream had a setting.

I have said that we were four boys; but at this time we were five—there was a little baby. He was very ill, however, and I knew he was not expected to live. I remember looking out of my bed one night and seeing my mother bending over him in her lap—it is one of the few things in which I do remember my mother. I fell asleep, but by and by woke and looked out again. No one was there. Not only were mother and baby gone, but the cradle was gone too. I knew that my little brother was dead. I did not cry: I was too young and ignorant to cry about it. I went to sleep again, and seemed to wake once more; but it was into my dream this time. There were the sun and the moon and the stars. But the sun and the moon had got close together and were talking very earnestly, and all the stars had gathered round them. I could not hear a word they said, but I concluded that they were talking about my little brother. "I suppose I ought to be sorry," I said to myself; and I tried hard, but I

could not feel sorry. Meantime I observed a curious motion in the heavenly host. They kept looking at me and then at the corner where the ladder stood, and talking on, for I saw their lips moving very fast; and I thought by the motion of them that they were saying something about the ladder. I got out of bed and went to it. If I could only get up it! I would try once more. To my delight I found it would bear me. I climbed and climbed, and the sun and the moon and the stars looked more and more pleased as I got up nearer to them, till at last the sun's face was in a broad smile. But they did not move from their places, and my head rose above them, and got out at the hole where the ladder came in. What I saw there, I cannot tell. I only know that a wind such as had never blown upon me in my waking hours, blew upon me now. I did not care much for kisses then, for I had not learned how good they are; but somehow I fancied afterwards that the wind was made of my baby brother's kisses, and I began to love the little man who had lived only long enough to be our brother and get up above the sun and the moon and the stars by the ladder of sun-rays. But this, I say, I thought afterwards. Now all that I can remember of my dream is that I began to weep for very delight of something I have forgotten, and that I fell down the ladder into the room again and awoke, as one always does with a fall in a dream. Sun, moon, and stars were gone; the ladder of light had vanished; and I lay sobbing on my pillow.

I have taken up a great deal of room with this story of a dream, but it clung to me, and would often return. And then the time of life to which this chapter refers is all so like one, that a dream comes in well enough in it. There is a twilight of the mind, when all things are strange, and when the memory is only beginning to know that it has got a note-book, and must put things down in it.

It was not long after this before my mother died, and I was sorrier for my father than for myself—he looked so sad. I have said that as far back as I can remember, she was an invalid. Hence she was unable to be much with us. She is very beautiful in my memory, but during the last months of her life we seldom saw her, and the desire to keep the house quiet for her sake must have been the beginning of that freedom which we enjoyed during the whole of our boyhood. So we were out every day and all day long, finding our meals when we pleased, and that, as I shall explain, without going home for them. I remember her death clearly, but I will not dwell upon that. It is too sad to write much about, though she was happy, and the least troubled of us all. Her sole concern was at leaving her husband and children. But the will of God was a better thing to her than to live with them. My sorrow at least was soon over, for God makes children so that grief cannot cleave to them. They must not begin life with a burden of loss. He knows it is only for a time. When I see my mother again, she

will not reproach me that my tears were so soon dried. "Little one," I think I hear her saying, "how could you go on crying for your poor mother when God was mothering you all the time, and breathing life into you, and making the world a blessed place for you? You will tell me all about it some day." Yes, and we shall tell our mothers—shall we not?—how sorry we are that we ever gave them any trouble. Sometimes we were very naughty, and sometimes we did not know better. My mother was very good, but I cannot remember a single one of the many kisses she must have given me. I remember her holding my head to her bosom when she was dying—that is all.

CHAPTER III.

MY FATHER.

MY father was a tall, staid, solemn man, who walked slowly with long strides. He spoke very little, and generally looked as if he were pondering next Sunday's sermon. His head was grey, and a little bent, as if he were gathering truth from the ground. Once I came upon him in the garden, standing with his face up to heaven, and I thought he was seeing something in the clouds; but when I came nearer, I saw that his eyes were closed, and it made me feel very solemn. I crept away as if I had been peeping where I ought not. He did not talk much to us. What he said was very gentle, and it seemed to me it was his solemnity that made him gentle. I have seen him look very angry. He used to walk much about his fields, especially of a summer morning before the sun was up. This was after my mother's death. I presume he felt nearer to her in the fields than in the house. There was a kind of grandeur about him, I am sure; for I never saw one of his parishioners salute him in the road, without a look of my father himself

passing like a solemn cloud over the face of the man or woman. For us, we feared and loved him both at once. I do not remember ever being punished by him, but Kirsty (of whom I shall have to speak by and by) has told me that he did punish us when we were very small children. Neither did he teach us much himself, except on the occasions I am about to mention; and I cannot say that I learned much from his sermons. These gave entire satisfaction to those of his parishioners whom I happened to hear speak of them; but, although I loved the sound of his voice, and liked to look at his face as he stood up there in the ancient pulpit clad in his gown and bands, I never cared much about what he said. Of course it was all right, and a better sermon than any other clergyman whatever could have preached, but what it was all about was of no consequence to me. I may as well confess at once that I never had the least doubt that my father was the best man in the world. Nay, to this very hour I am of the same opinion, notwithstanding that the son of the village tailor once gave me a tremendous thrashing for saying so, on the ground that I was altogether wrong, seeing *his* father was the best man in the world—at least I have learned to modify the assertion only to this extent—that my father was the best man I have ever known.

The church was a very old one—had seen candles burning, heard the little bell ringing, and smelt the incense of the old Catholic service. It was so old, that

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THE MINISTER'S PEW.

it seemed settling down again into the earth, especially on one side, where great buttresses had been built to keep it up. It leaned against them like a weary old thing that wanted to go to sleep. It had a short square tower, like so many of the churches in England; and although there was but one old cracked bell in it, although there was no organ to give out its glorious sounds, although there was neither chanting nor responses, I assure my English readers that the awe and reverence which fell upon me as I crossed its worn threshold were nowise inferior, as far as I can judge, to the awe and respect they feel when they enter the more beautiful churches of their country. There was a hush in it which demanded a refraining of the foot, a treading softly as upon holy ground; and the church was inseparably associated with my father.

The pew we sat in was a square one, with a table in the middle of it for our books. My brother David generally used it for laying his head upon, that he might go to sleep comfortably. My brother Tom put his feet on the cross-bar of it, leaned back in his corner —for you see we had a corner apiece—put his hands in his trowsers' pockets, and stared hard at my father —for Tom's corner was well in front of the pulpit. My brother Allister, whose back was to the pulpit, used to learn the *paraphrases* all the time of the sermon. I, happiest of all in my position, could look up at my father, if I pleased, a little sideways; or, if I preferred, which I confess I often did, study—a rare sight in

Scotch churches—the figure of an armed knight, carved in stone, which lay on the top of the tomb of Sir Worm Wymble—at least that is the nearest I can come to the spelling of the name they gave him. The tomb was close by the side of the pew, with only a flagged passage between. It stood in a hollow in the wall, and the knight lay under the arch of the recess, so silent, so patient, with folded palms, as if praying for some help which he could not name. From the presence of this labour of the sculptor came a certain element into the feeling of the place, which it could not otherwise have possessed: organ and chant were not altogether needful while that carved knight lay there with face upturned, as if looking to heaven.

But from gazing at the knight I began to regard the wall about him, and the arch over him; and from the arch my eye would seek the roof, and descending, rest on the pillars, or wander about the windows, searching the building of the place, discovering the points of its strength, and how it was upheld. So that while my father was talking of the church as a company of believers, and describing how it was held together by faith, I was trying to understand how the stone and lime of the old place was kept from falling asunder, and thus beginning to follow what has become my profession since; for I am an architect.

But the church has led me away from my father. He always spoke in rather a low voice, but so earnestly that every eye, as it seemed to me, but mine

and those of two of my brothers, was fixed upon him. I think, however, that it was in part the fault of certain teaching of his own, better fitted for our understanding, that we paid so little heed. Even Tom, with all his staring, knew as little about the sermon as any of us. But my father did not question us much concerning it; he did what was far better. On Sunday afternoons, in the warm, peaceful sunlight of summer, with the honeysuckle filling the air of the little arbour in which we sat, and his one glass of wine set on the table in the middle, he would sit for an hour talking away to us in his gentle, slow, deep voice, telling us story after story out of the New Testament, and explaining them in a way I have seldom heard equalled. Or, in the cold winter nights, he would come into the room where I and my two younger brothers slept—the nursery it was—and, sitting down with Tom by his side before the fire that burned bright in the frosty air, would open the great family Bible on the table, turn his face towards the two beds where we three lay wide awake, and tell us story after story out of the Old Testament, sometimes reading a few verses, sometimes turning the bare facts into an expanded and illustrated narrative of his own, which, in Shakspere fashion, he presented after the modes and ways of our own country and time. I shall never forget Joseph in Egypt hearing the pattering of the asses' hoofs in the street, and throwing up the window, and looking out, and seeing all his own brothers coming riding towards him; or the grand

rush of the sea waves over the bewildered hosts of the Egyptians. We lay and listened with all the more enjoyment, that while the fire was burning so brightly, and the presence of my father filling the room with safety and peace, the wind was howling outside, and the snow drifting up against the window. Sometimes I passed into the land of sleep with his voice in my ears and his love in my heart; perhaps into the land of visions—once certainly into a dream of the sun and moon and stars making obeisance to the too-favoured son of Jacob.

CHAPTER IV.

KIRSTY.

MY father had a housekeeper, a trusty woman, he considered her. We thought her *very* old. I suppose she was about forty. She was not pleasant, for she was grim-faced and censorious, with a very straight back, and a very long upper lip. Indeed the distance from her nose to her mouth was greater than the length of her nose. When I think of her first, it is always as making some complaint to my father against us. Perhaps she meant to speak the truth, or rather, perhaps, took it for granted that she always did speak the truth; but certainly she would exaggerate things, and give them quite another look. The bones of her story might be true, but she would put a skin over it after her own fashion, which was not one of mildness and charity. The consequence was that the older we grew, the more our minds were alienated from her, and the more we came to regard her as our enemy. If she really meant to be our friend after the best fashion she knew, it was at least an uncomely kind of friendship, that showed itself in constant opposition, fault-finding,

and complaint. The real mistake was that we were boys. There was something in her altogether antagonistic to the boy-nature. You would have thought that to be a boy was in her eyes to be something wrong to begin with; that boys ought never to have been made; that they must always, by their very nature, be about something amiss. I have occasionally wondered how she would have behaved to a girl. On reflection, I think a little better; but the girl would have been worse off, because she could not have escaped from her as we did. My father would hear her complaints to the end without putting in a word, except it were to ask her a question, and, when she had finished, would turn again to his book or his sermon, saying—

"Very well, Mrs. Mitchell; I will speak to them about it."

My impression is that he did not believe the half she told him. At all events, when he had sent for us, he would ask our version of the affair, and listen to that as he had listened to hers. Then he would set forth to us where we had been wrong, if we were wrong, and send us away with an injunction not to provoke Mrs. Mitchell, who couldn't help being short in her temper, poor thing! Somehow or other we got it into our heads that the shortness of her temper was mysteriously associated with the shortness of her nose.

She was saving even to stinginess. She would do her best to provide what my father liked, but for us

she thought almost anything good enough. She would, for instance, give us the thinnest of milk—we said she skimmed it three times before she thought it blue enough for us. My two younger brothers did not mind it so much as I did, for I was always rather delicate, and, if I took a dislike to anything, would rather go without than eat or drink of it. But I have told you enough about her to make it plain that she could be no favourite with us; and enough likewise to serve as a background to my description of Kirsty.

Kirsty was a Highland woman who had the charge of the house in which the farm-servants lived. She was a cheerful, gracious, kind woman — a woman of God's making, one would say, were it not that, however mysterious it may look, we cannot deny that he made Mrs. Mitchell too. It is very puzzling, I confess. I remember once that my youngest brother Davie, a very little fellow then, for he could not speak plainly, came running in great distress to Kirsty, crying, "Fee, fee!" by which he meant to indicate that a flea was rendering his life miserable. Kirsty at once undressed him and entered on the pursuit. After a successful search, while she was putting on his garments again, little Davie, who had been looking very solemn and thoughtful for some time, said, not in a questioning, but in a concluding tone—

"God didn't make the fees, Kirsty!"

"Oh yes, Davie! God made everything. God did make the fleas," said Kirsty.

Davie was silent for a while. Then he opened his mouth and spake like a discontented prophet of old:

"Why doesn't he give them something else to eat, then?"

"You must ask himself that," said Kirsty, with a wisdom I have since learned to comprehend, though I remember it shocked me a little at the time.

All this set me thinking. Before the dressing of little Davie was over, I had *my* question to put to Kirsty. It was, in fact, the same question, only with a more important object in the eye of it.

"*Then* I suppose God made Mrs. Mitchell, as well as you and the rest of us, Kirsty?" I said.

"Certainly, Ranald," returned Kirsty.

"Well, I wish he hadn't," was my remark, in which I only imitated my baby brother, who was always much cleverer than I.

"Oh! she's not a bad sort," said Kirsty; "though I must say, if I was her, I would try to be a little more agreeable."

To return to Kirsty: she was our constant resort. The farm-house was a furlong or so from the manse, but with the blood pouring from a cut finger, the feet would of themselves devour that furlong rather than apply to Mrs. Mitchell. Oh! she was dear, and good, and kind, our Kirsty!

In person she was short and slender, with keen blue eyes and dark hair; an uncommonly small foot, which she claimed for all Highland folk; a light step, a sweet

voice, and a most bounteous hand—but there I come into the moral nature of her, for it is the mind that makes the hand bountiful. For her face, I think that was rather queer, but in truth I can hardly tell, so entirely was it the sign of good to me and my brothers; in short, I loved her so much that I do not know now, even as I did not care then, whether she was nice-looking or not. She was quite as old as Mrs. Mitchell, but we never thought of *her* being old. She was our refuge in all time of trouble and necessity. It was she who gave us something to eat as often and as much as we wanted. She used to say it was no cheating of the minister to feed the minister's boys.

And then her stories! There was nothing like them in all that country side. It was rather a dreary country in outward aspect, having many bleak moorland hills, that lay about like slow-stiffened waves, of no great height but of much desolation; and as far as the imagination was concerned, it would seem that the minds of former generations had been as bleak as the country, they had left such small store of legends of any sort. But Kirsty had come from a region where the hills were hills indeed—hills with mighty skeletons of stone inside them; hills that looked as if they had been heaped over huge monsters which were ever trying to get up — a country where every cliff, and rock, and well had its story—and Kirsty's head was full of such. It was delight indeed to sit by her fire and listen to them. That would be after the men had

had their supper, early of a winter night, and had gone, two of them to the village, and the other to attend to the horses. Then we and the herd, as we called the boy who attended to the cattle, whose work was over for the night, would sit by the fire, and Kirsty would tell us stories, and we were in our heaven.

CHAPTER V.

I BEGIN LIFE.

I BEGAN life, and that after no pleasant fashion, as near as I can guess, about the age of six years. One glorious morning in early summer I found myself led by the ungentle hand of Mrs. Mitchell towards a little school on the outside of the village, kept by an old woman called Mrs. Shand. In an English village I think she would have been called Dame Shand: we called her Luckie Shand. Half dragged along the road by Mrs. Mitchell, from whose rough grasp I attempted in vain to extricate my hand, I looked around at the shining fields and up at the blue sky, where a lark was singing as if he had just found out that he could sing, with something like the despair of a man going to the gallows and bidding farewell to the world. We had to cross a little stream, and when we reached the middle of the foot-bridge, I tugged yet again at my imprisoned hand, with a half-formed intention of throwing myself into the brook. But my efforts were still unavailing. Over a half-mile or so, rendered weary by unwillingness, I was led to the

cottage door—no such cottage as some of my readers will picture, with roses and honeysuckle hiding its walls, but a dreary little house with nothing green to cover the brown stones of which it was built, and having an open ditch in front of it with a stone slab over it for a bridge. Did I say there was nothing on the walls? This morning there was the loveliest sunshine, and that I was going to leave behind. It was very bitter, especially as I had expected to go with my elder brother to spend the day at a neighbouring farm.

Mrs. Mitchell opened the door, and led me in. It was an awful experience. Dame Shand stood at her table ironing. She was as tall as Mrs. Mitchell, and that was enough to prejudice me against her at once. She wore a close-fitting widow's cap, with a black ribbon round it. Her hair was gray, and her face was as gray as her hair, and her skin was gathered in wrinkles about her mouth, where they twitched and twitched, as if she were constantly meditating something unpleasant. She looked up inquiringly.

"I 've brought you a new scholar," said Mrs. Mitchell.

"Well. Very well," said the dame, in a dubious tone. "I hope he 's a good boy, for he must be good if he comes here."

"Well, he 's just middling. His father spares the rod, Mrs. Shand, and we know what comes of that."

They went on with their talk, which, as far as I can recall it, was complimentary to none but the two women

themselves. Meantime I was making what observations my terror would allow. About a dozen children were seated on forms along the walls, looking over the tops of their spelling-books at the new-comer. In the further corner two were kicking at each other as opportunity offered, looking very angry, but not daring to cry. My next discovery was terribly disconcerting. Some movement drew my eyes to the floor; there I saw a boy of my own age on all-fours, fastened by a string to a leg of the table at which the dame was ironing, while — horrible to relate!—a dog, not very big but very ugly, and big enough to be frightened at, lay under the table watching him. I gazed in utter dismay.

"Ah, you may look!" said the dame. "If you're not a good boy, that is how you shall be served. The dog shall have you to look after."

I trembled, and was speechless. After some further confabulation Mrs. Mitchell took her leave, saying—

"I'll come back for him at one o'clock, and if I don't come, just keep him till I do come."

The dame accompanied her to the door, and then I discovered that she was lame, and hobbled very much. A resolution arose full-formed in my brain.

I sat down on the form near the door, and kept very quiet. Had it not been for the intention I cherished, I am sure I should have cried. When the dame returned, she resumed her box-iron, in which the heater went rattling about, as, standing on one leg—the other was so much shorter—she moved it to and fro over

the garment on the table. Then she called me to her by name in a would-be pompous manner. I obeyed, trembling.

"Can you say your letters?" she asked.

Now, although I could not read, I could repeat the alphabet; how I had learned it I do not know. I did repeat it.

"How many questions of your catechism can you say?" she asked next.

Not knowing with certainty what she meant, I was silent.

"No sulking!" said the dame; and opening a drawer in the table, she took out a catechism. Turning back the cover she put it in my hand, and told me to learn the first question. She had not even inquired whether I could read. I took the catechism, and stood as before.

"Go to your seat," she said.

I obeyed, and with the book before me pondered my plan.

Everything depended on whether I could open the door before she could reach me. Once out of the house, I was sure of running faster than she could follow And soon I had my first experience of how those are helped who will help themselves.

The ironing of course required a fire to make the irons hot, and as the morning went on, the sunshine on the walls, conspiring with the fire on the hearth, made the place too hot for the comfort of the old

dame. She went and set the door wide open. I was instantly on the alert, watching for an opportunity. One soon occurred.

A class of some five or six was reading, if reading it could be called, out of the Bible. At length it came to the turn of one who blundered dreadfully. It was the same boy who had been tied under the table, but he had been released for his lesson. The dame hobbled to him, and found he had his book upside down; whereupon she turned in wrath to the table, and took from the drawer a long leather strap, with which she proceeded to chastise him. As his first cry reached my ears I was half-way to the door. On the threshold I stumbled and fell.

"The new boy's running away!" shrieked some little sycophant inside.

I heard with horror, but I was up and off in a moment. I had not, however, got many yards from the cottage before I heard the voice of the dame screaming after me to return. I took no heed—only sped the faster. But what was my horror to find her command enforced by the pursuing bark of her prime minister. This paralysed me. I turned, and there was the fiendish-looking dog close on my heels. I could run no longer. For one moment I felt as if I should sink to the earth for sheer terror. The next moment a wholesome rage sent the blood to my brain. From abject cowardice to wild attack—I cannot call it courage—was the change of an instant. I rushed towards the

little wretch. I did not know how to fight him, but in desperation I threw myself upon him, and dug my nails into him. They had fortunately found their way to his eyes. He was the veriest coward of his species. He yelped and howled, and struggling from my grasp ran with his tail merged in his person back to his mistress, who was hobbling after me. But with the renewed strength of triumph I turned again for home, and ran as I had never run before. When or where the dame gave in, I do not know; I never turned my head until I laid it on Kirsty's bosom, and there I burst out sobbing and crying. It was all the utterance I had left.

As soon as Kirsty had succeeded in calming me, I told her the whole story. She said very little, but I could see she was very angry. No doubt she was pondering what could be done. She got me some milk—half cream I do believe, it was so nice—and some oat-cake, and went on with her work.

While I ate I reflected that any moment Mrs. Mitchell might appear to drag me back in disgrace to that horrible den. I knew that Kirsty's authority was not equal to hers, and that she would be compelled to give me up. So I watched an opportunity to escape once more and hide myself, so that Kirsty might be able to say she did not know where I was.

When I had finished, and Kirsty had left the kitchen for a moment, I sped noiselessly to the door, and looked out into the farm-yard. There was no one to be seen.

Dark and brown and cool the door of the barn stood open, as if inviting me to shelter and safety; for I knew that in the darkest end of it lay a great heap of oat-straw. I sped across the intervening sunshine into the darkness, and began burrowing in the straw like a wild animal, drawing out handfuls and laying them carefully aside, so that no disorder should betray my retreat. When I had made a hole large enough to hold me, I got in, but kept drawing out the straw behind me, and filling the hole in front. This I continued until I had not only stopped up the entrance, but placed a good thickness of straw between me and the outside. By the time I had burrowed as far as I thought necessary, I was tired, and lay down at full length in my hole, delighting in such a sense of safety as I had never before experienced. I was soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER VI.

NO FATHER.

WOKE, and creeping out of my lair, and peeping from the door of the barn, which looked into the corn-yard, found that the sun was going down. I had already discovered that I was getting hungry. I went out at the other door into the close or farm-yard, and ran across to the house. No one was there. Something moved me to climb on the form and look out of a little window, from which I could see the manse and the road from it. To my dismay, there was Mrs. Mitchell coming towards the farm. I pos-

sessed my wits sufficiently to run first to Kirsty's press and secure a good supply of oat-cake, with which I then sped like a hunted hare to her form. I had soon drawn the stopper of straw into the mouth of the hole, where, hearing no one approach, I began to eat my oat-cake, and fell asleep again before I had finished.

And as I slept I dreamed my dream. The sun was looking very grave, and the moon reflected his concern. They were not satisfied with me. At length the sun shook his head; that is, his whole self oscillated on an axis, and the moon thereupon shook herself in response. Then they nodded to each other as much as to say, "That is entirely my own opinion." At last they began to talk; not as men converse, but both at once, yet each listening while each spoke. I heard no word, but their lips moved most busily; their eyebrows went up and down; their eyelids winked and winked, and their cheeks puckered and relaxed incessantly. There was an absolute storm of expression upon their faces; their very noses twisted and curled. It seemed as if, in the agony of their talk, their countenances would go to pieces. For the stars, they darted about hither and thither, gathered into groups, dispersed, and formed new groups, and having no faces yet, but being a sort of celestial tadpoles, indicated by their motions alone that they took an active interest in the questions agitating their parents. Some of them kept darting up and down the ladder of rays, like phosphorescent sparks in the sea-foam.

I could bear it no longer, and awoke. I was in darkness, but not in my own bed. When I proceeded to turn, I found myself hemmed in on all sides. I could not stretch my arms, and there was hardly room for my body between my feet and my head. I was dreadfully frightened at first, and felt as if I were being slowly stifled. As my brain awoke, I recalled the horrible school, the horrible schoolmistress, and the most horrible dog, over whose defeat, however, I rejoiced with the pride of a dragon-slayer. Next I thought it would be well to look abroad, and reconnoitre once more. I drew away the straw from the entrance to my lair; but what was my dismay to find that even when my hand went out into space no light came through the opening. What could it mean? Surely I had not grown blind while I lay asleep. Hurriedly I shot out the remainder of the stopper of straw, and crept from the hole. In the great barn there was but the dullest glimmer of light; I had almost said the clumsiest reduction of darkness. I tumbled at one of the doors rather than ran to it. I found it fast, but this one I knew was fastened on the inside by a wooden bolt or bar, which I could draw back. The open door revealed the dark night. Before me was the corn-yard, as we called it, full of ricks. Huge and very positive although dim, they rose betwixt me and the sky. Between their tops I saw only stars and darkness. I turned and looked back into the barn. It appeared a horrible cave filled with darkness. I

remembered there were rats in it. I dared not enter it again, even to go out at the opposite door: I forgot how soundly and peacefully I had slept in it. I stepped out into the night with the grass of the corn-yard under my feet, the awful vault of heaven over my head, and those shadowy ricks around me. It was a relief to lay my hand on one of them, and feel that it was solid. I half groped my way through them, and got out into the open field, by creeping through between the stems of what had once been a hawthorn-hedge, but had in the course of a hundred years grown into the grimmest, largest, most grotesque trees I have ever seen of the kind. I had always been a little afraid of them, even in the daytime, but they did me no hurt, and I stood in the vast hall of the silent night—alone: there lay the awfulness of it. I had never before known what the night was. The real sting of its fear lay in this—that there was nobody else in it. Everybody besides me was asleep all over the world, and had abandoned me to my fate, whatever might come out of the darkness to seize me. When I got round the edge of the stone wall, which on another side bounded the corn-yard, there was the moon—crescent, as I saw her in my dream, but low down towards the horizon, and lying almost upon her rounded back. She looked very disconsolate and dim. Even she would take no heed of me, abandoned child! The stars were high up, away in the heavens. They did not look like the children of the sun and moon at all, and *they* took no heed of

me. Yet there was a grandeur in my desolation that would have elevated my heart but for the fear. If I had had one living creature nigh me—if only the stupid calf, whose dull sleepy low startled me so dreadfully as I stood staring about me! It was not dark out here in the open field, for at this season of the year it is not dark there all night long, when the sky is unclouded. Away in the north was the Great Bear. I knew that constellation, for by it one of the men had taught me to find the pole-star. Nearly under it was the light of the sun, creeping round by the north towards the spot in the east where he would rise again. But I learned only afterwards to understand this. I gazed at that pale faded light, and all at once I remembered that God was near me. But I did not know what God is then as I know now, and when I thought about him then, which was neither much nor often, my idea of him was not like him; it was merely a confused mixture of other people's fancies about him and my own. I had not learned how beautiful God is; I had only learned that he is strong. I had been told that he was angry with those that did wrong; I had not understood that he loved them all the time, although he was displeased with them, and must punish them to make them good. When I thought of him now in the silent starry night, a yet greater terror seized me, and I ran stumbling over the uneven field.

Does my reader wonder whither I fled? Whither should I fly but home? True, Mrs. Mitchell was there,

but there was another there as well. Even Kirsty would not do in this terror. Home was the only refuge, for my father was there. I sped for the manse.

But as I approached it a new apprehension laid hold of my trembling heart. I was not sure, but I thought the door was always locked at night. I drew nearer. The place of possible refuge rose before me. I stood on the grass-plot in front of it. There was no light in its eyes. Its mouth was closed. It was silent as one of the ricks. Above it shone the speechless stars. Nothing was alive. Nothing would speak. I went up the few rough-hewn granite steps that led to the door. I laid my hand on the handle, and gently turned it. Joy of joys! the door opened. I entered the hall. Ah! it was more silent than the night. No footsteps echoed; no voices were there. I closed the door behind me, and, almost sick with the misery of a being where no other being was to comfort it, I groped my way to my father's room. When I once had my hand on his door, the warm tide of courage began again to flow from my heart. I opened this door too very quietly, for was not the dragon asleep down below?

"Papa! papa!" I cried, in an eager whisper. "Are you awake, papa?"

No voice came in reply, and the place was yet more silent than the night or the hall. He must be asleep. I was afraid to call louder. I crept nearer to the bed. I stretched out my hands to feel for him. He must be at the further side. I climbed up on the bed. I

felt all across it. Utter desertion seized my soul—my father was not there! Was it a horrible dream? Should I ever awake? My heart sank totally within me. I could bear no more. I fell down on the bed weeping bitterly, and wept myself asleep.

Years after, when I was a young man, I read Jean Paul's terrible dream that there was no God, and the desolation of this night was my key to that dream.

Once more I awoke to a sense of misery, and stretched out my arms, crying, "Papa! papa!" The same moment I found my father's arms around me: he folded me close to him, and said—

"Hush, Ranald, my boy! Here I am. You are quite safe."

I nestled as close to him as I could go, and wept for blessedness.

"Oh, papa!" I sobbed, "I thought I had lost you."

"And I thought I had lost you, my boy. Tell me all about it."

Between my narrative and my replies to his questionings he had soon gathered the whole story, and I in my turn learned the dismay of the household when I did not appear. Kirsty told what she knew. They searched everywhere, but could not find me; and great as my misery had been, my father's had been greater than mine. While I stood forsaken and desolate in the field, they had been searching along the banks of the river. But the herd had had an idea, and although they had already searched the barn and

every place they could think of, he left them and ran back for a further search about the farm. Guided by the scattered straw, he soon came upon my deserted lair, and sped back to the river-side with the news, when my father returned, and after failing to find me in my own bed, to his infinite relief found me fast asleep on his; so fast, that he undressed me and laid me in the bed without my once opening my eyes—the more strange, as I had already slept so long. But sorrow is very sleepy.

Having thus felt the awfulness and majesty of the heavens at night, it was a very long time before I again dreamed my childish dream.

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. MITCHELL IS DEFEATED.

AFTER this talk with my father, I fell into a sleep of perfect contentment, and never thought of what might be on the morrow till the morrow came. Then I grew aware of the danger I was in of being carried off once more to school. Indeed, except my father interfered, the thing was almost inevitable. I thought he would protect me, but I had no assurance. He was gone again, for, as I have mentioned already, he was given to going out early in the mornings. It was not early now, however: I had slept much longer than usual. I got up at once, intending to find him; but, to my horror, before I was half dressed, my enemy, Mrs. Mitchell, came into the room, looking triumphant and revengeful.

"I 'm glad to see you 're getting up," she said; "it 's nearly school-time."

The tone, and the emphasis she laid on the word *school*, would have sufficed to reveal the state of her mind, even if her eyes had not been fierce with suppressed indignation.

"I haven't had my porridge," I said.

"Your porridge is waiting you—as cold as a stone," she answered. "If boys will lie in bed so late, what can they expect?"

"Nothing from you," I muttered, with more hardihood than I had yet shown her.

"What's that you're saying?" she asked angrily.

I was silent.

"Make haste," she went on, "and don't keep me waiting all day."

"You needn't wait, Mrs. Mitchell. I am dressing as fast as I can. Is papa in his study yet?"

"No. And you needn't think to see him. He's angry enough with you, I'll warrant."

She little knew what had passed between my father and me already. She could not imagine what a talk we had had.

"You needn't think to run away, as you did yesterday. I know all about it. Mrs. Shand told me all about it. I shouldn't wonder if your papa's gone to see her now, and tell her how sorry he is you were so naughty."

"I'm not going to school."

"We'll see about that."

"I tell you I won't go."

"And I tell you we'll see about it."

"I won't go till I've seen papa. If he says I'm to go, I will of course; but I won't go for you."

"You *will*, and you *won't!*" she repeated, standing

staring at me, as I leisurely, but with hands trembling partly with fear, partly with rage, was fastening my nether garments to my waistcoat. "That's all very fine, but I know something a good deal finer. Now wash your face."

"I won't, so long as you stand there," I said, and sat down on the floor. She advanced towards me.

"If you touch me, I'll scream," I cried.

She stopped, thought for a moment, and bounced out of the room. But I heard her turn the key of the door.

I proceeded with my dressing as fast as I could then; and the moment I was ready, opened the window, which was only a few feet from the ground, scrambled out, and dropped. I hurt myself a little, but not much, and fled for the harbour of Kirsty's arms. But as I turned the corner of the house I ran right into Mrs. Mitchell's, who received me with no soft embrace. In fact I was rather severely scratched with a pin in the bosom of her dress.

"There! that serves you right," she cried. "That's a judgment on you for trying to run away again. After all the trouble you gave us yesterday too! You are a bad boy."

"Why am I a bad boy?" I retorted.

"It's bad not to do what you are told."

"I will do what my papa tells me."

"Your papa! There are more people than your papa in the world."

"I'm to be a bad boy if I don't do what anybody like you chooses to tell me, am I?"

"None of your impudence!"

This was accompanied by a box on the ear. She was now dragging me into the kitchen. There she set my porridge before me, which I declined to eat.

"Well, if you won't eat good food, you shall go to school without it."

"I tell you I won't go to school."

She caught me up in her arms. She was very strong, and I could not prevent her carrying me out of the house. If I had been the bad boy she said I was, I could by biting and scratching have soon compelled her to set me down; but I felt that I must not do that, for then I should be ashamed before my father. I therefore yielded for the time, and fell to planning. Nor was I long in coming to a resolution. I drew the pin that had scratched me from her dress. I believed she would not carry me very far; but if she did not set me down soon, I resolved to make her glad to do so. Further I resolved, that when we came to the foot-bridge, which had but one rail to it, I would run the pin into her and make her let me go, when I would instantly throw myself into the river, for I would run the risk of being drowned rather than go to that school. Were all my griefs of yesterday, overcome and on the point of being forgotten, to be frustrated in this fashion? My whole blood was boiling. I was convinced my father did not want me to go. He

could not have been so kind to me during the night, and then send me to such a place in the morning. But happily for the general peace, things did not arrive at such a desperate pass. Before we were out of the gate, my heart leaped with joy, for I heard my father calling, "Mrs. Mitchell! Mrs. Mitchell!" I looked round, and seeing him coming after us with his long slow strides, I fell to struggling so violently in the strength of hope that she was glad to set me down. I broke from her, ran to my father, and burst out crying.

"Papa! papa!" I sobbed, "don't send me to that horrid school. I can learn to read without that old woman to teach me."

"Really, Mrs. Mitchell," said my father, taking me by the hand and leading me towards her, where she stood visibly flaming with rage and annoyance, "really, Mrs. Mitchell, you are taking too much upon you! I never said the child was to go to that woman's school. In fact I don't approve of what I hear of her, and I have thought of consulting some of my brethren in the presbytery on the matter before taking steps myself. I won't have the young people in my parish oppressed in such a fashion. Terrified with dogs too! It is shameful."

"She 's a very decent woman, Mistress Shand," said the housekeeper.

"I don't dispute her decency, Mrs. Mitchell; but I doubt very much whether she is fit to have the charge

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ON THE WAY BACK TO SCHOOL.

of children; and as she is a friend of yours, you will be doing her a kindness to give her a hint to that effect. It *may* save the necessity for my taking further and more unpleasant steps."

"Indeed, sir, by your leave, it would be hard lines to take the bread out of the mouth of a lone widow woman, and bring her upon the parish with a bad name to boot. She 's supported herself for years with her school, and been a trouble to nobody."

"Except the lambs of the flock, Mrs. Mitchell.—I like you for standing up for your friend; but is a woman, because she is lone and a widow, to make a Moloch of herself, and have the children sacrificed to her in that way? It 's enough to make idiots of some of them. She had better see to it. You tell her that—from me, if you like. And don't you meddle with school affairs. I 'll take my young men," he added with a smile, "to school when I see fit."

"I 'm sure, sir," said Mrs. Mitchell, putting her blue striped apron to her eyes, "I asked your opinion before I took him."

"I believe I did say something about it 's being time he were able to read, but I recollect nothing more.—You must have misunderstood me," he added, willing to ease her descent to the valley of her humiliation.

She walked away without another word, sniffing the air as she went, and carrying her hands folded under her apron. From that hour I believe she hated me.

My father looked after her with a smile, and then looked down on me, saying—

"She's short in the temper, poor woman! and we mustn't provoke her."

I was too well satisfied to urge my victory by further complaint. I could afford to let well alone, for I had been delivered as from the fiery furnace, and the earth and the sky were laughing around me. Oh! what a sunshine filled the world! How glad the larks, which are the praisers amongst the birds, were that blessed morning! The demon of oppression had hidden her head ashamed, and fled to her den!

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW SCHOOLMISTRESS.

"BUT, Ranald," my father continued, "what are we to do about the reading? I fear I have let you go too long. I didn't want to make learning a burden to you, and I don't approve of children learning to read too soon; but really, at your age, you know, it is time you were beginning. I have time to teach you some things, but I can't teach you everything. I have got to read a great deal and think a great deal, and go about my parish a good deal. And your brother Tom has heavy lessons to learn at school, and I have to help him. So what's to be done, Ranald, my boy? You can't go to the parish school before you've learned your letters."

"There's Kirsty, papa," I suggested.

"Yes; there's Kirsty," he returned with a sly smile. "Kirsty can do everything, can't she?"

"She can speak Gaelic," I said with a tone of triumph, bringing her rarest accomplishment to the forefront.

"I wish you could speak Gaelic," said my father,

thinking of his wife, I believe, whose mother-tongue it was. "But that is not what you want most to learn. Do you think Kirsty could teach you to read English?"

"Yes, I do."

My father again meditated.

"Let us go and ask her," he said at length, taking my hand.

I capered with delight, nor ceased my capering till we stood on Kirsty's earthen floor. I think I see her now, dusting one of her deal chairs, as white as soap and sand could make it, for the minister to sit on. She never called him *the master*, but always *the minister*. She was a great favourite with my father, and he always behaved as a visitor in her house.

"Well, Kirsty," he said, after the first salutations were over, "have you any objection to turn schoolmistress?"

"I should make a poor hand at that," she answered, with a smile to me which showed she guessed what my father wanted. "But if it were to teach Master Ranald there, I should like dearly to try what I could do."

She never omitted the *Master* to our names; Mrs. Mitchell by no chance prefixed it. The natural manners of the Celt and Saxon are almost diametrically opposed in Scotland. And had Kirsty's speech been in the coarse dialect of Mrs. Mitchell, I am confident my father would not have allowed her to teach me. But Kirsty did not speak a word of Scotch, and although her English was a little broken and odd,

being formed somewhat after Gaelic idioms, her tone was pure and her phrases were refined. The matter was very speedily settled between them.

"And if you want to beat him, Kirsty, you can beat him in Gaelic, and then he won't feel it," said my father, trying after a joke, which was no common occurrence with him, whereupon Kirsty and I laughed in great contentment.

The fact was, Kirsty had come to the manse with my mother, and my father was attached to her for the sake of his wife as well as for her own, and Kirsty would have died for the minister or any one of his boys. All the devotion a Highland woman has for the chief of her clan, Kirsty had for my father, not to mention the reverence due to the minister.

After a little chat about the cows and the calves, my father rose, saying—

"Then I'll just make him over to you, Kirsty. Do you think you can manage without letting it interfere with your work, though?"

"Oh yes, sir—well that! I shall soon have him reading to me while I'm busy about. If he doesn't know the word, he can spell it, and then I shall know it—at least if it's not longer than Hawkie's tail."

Hawkie was a fine milker, with a bad temper, and a comically short tail. It had got chopped off by some accident when she was a calf.

"There's something else short about Hawkie—isn't there, Kirsty?" said my father.

"And Mrs. Mitchell," I suggested, thinking to help Kirsty to my father's meaning.

"Come, come, young gentleman! We don't want your remarks," said my father pleasantly.

"Why, papa, you told me so yourself, just before we came up."

"Yes, I did; but I did not mean you to repeat it. What if Kirsty were to go and tell Mrs. Mitchell?"

Kirsty made no attempt at protestation. She knew well enough that my father knew there was no danger. She only laughed, and I, seeing Kirsty satisfied, was satisfied also, and joined in the laugh.

The result was that before many weeks were over, Allister and wee Davie were Kirsty's pupils also, Allister learning to read, and wee Davie to sit still, which was the hardest task within his capacity. They were free to come or keep away, but not to go: if they did come, Kirsty insisted on their staying out the lesson. It soon became a regular thing. Every morning in summer we might be seen perched on a form, under one of the tiny windows, in that delicious brown light which you seldom find but in an old clay-floored cottage. In a fir-wood I think you have it; and I have seen it in an old castle; but best of all in the house of mourning in an Arab cemetery. In the winter, we seated ourselves round the fire — as near it as Kirsty's cooking operations, which were simple enough, admitted. It was delightful to us boys, and would have been amusing to any one, to see how Kirsty behaved when Mrs. Mitchell found

occasion to pay her a visit during lesson-hours. She knew her step and darted to the door. Not once did she permit her to enter. She was like a hen with her chickens.

"No, you'll not come in just now, Mrs. Mitchell," she would say, as the housekeeper attempted to pass. "You know we're busy."

"I want to hear how they're getting on."

"You can try them at home," Kirsty would answer.

We always laughed at the idea of our reading to her. Once I believe she heard the laugh, for she instantly walked away, and I do not remember that she ever came again.

CHAPTER IX.

WE LEARN OTHER THINGS.

WE were more than ever at the farm now. During the summer, from the time we got up till the time we went to bed, we seldom approached the manse. I have heard it hinted that my father neglected us. But that can hardly be, seeing that then his word was law to us, and now I regard his memory as the symbol of the love unspeakable. My elder brother Tom always had his meals with him, and sat at his lessons in the study. But my father did not mind the younger ones running wild, so long as there was a Kirsty for them to run to; and indeed the men also were not only friendly to us, but careful over us. No doubt we were rather savage, very different in our appearance from town-bred children, who are washed and dressed every time they go out for a walk: that we should have considered not merely a hardship, but an indignity. To be free was all our notion of a perfect existence. But my father's rebuke was awful indeed, if he found even the youngest guilty of untruth, or cruelty, or injustice. At all kinds of escapades, not

involving disobedience, he smiled, except indeed there were too much danger, when he would warn and limit.

A town boy may wonder what we could find to amuse us all day long; but the fact is almost everything was an amusement, seeing that when we could not take a natural share in what was going on, we generally managed to invent some collateral employment fictitiously related to it. But he must not think of our farm as at all like some great farm he may happen to know in England; for there was nothing done by machinery on the place. There may be great pleasure in watching machine-operations, but surely none to equal the pleasure we had. If there had been a steam-engine to plough my father's fields, how could we have ridden home on its back in the evening? To ride the horses home from the plough was a triumph. Had there been a thrashing-machine, could its pleasures have been comparable to that of lying in the straw and watching the grain dance from the sheaves under the skilful flails of the two strong men who belaboured them? There was a winnowing-machine, but quite a tame one, for its wheel I could drive myself — the handle now high as my head, now low as my knee — and watch at the same time the storm of chaff driven like drifting snow-flakes from its wide mouth. Meantime the oat-grain was flowing in a silent slow stream from the shelving hole in the other side, and the wind, rushing through the opposite doors, aided the winnower by catching at the expelled chaff, and carrying it yet

further apart. I think I see old Eppie now, filling her sack with what the wind blew her; not with the grain: Eppie did not covet that; she only wanted her bed filled with fresh springy chaff, on which she would sleep as sound as her rheumatism would let her, and as warm and dry and comfortable as any duchess in the land that happened to have the rheumatism too. For comfort is inside more than outside; and eider-down, delicious as it is, has less to do with it than some people fancy. How I wish all the poor people in the great cities could have good chaff beds to lie upon! Let me see: what more machines are there now? More than I can tell. I saw one going in the fields the other day, at the use of which I could only guess. Strange, wild-looking, mad-like machines, as the Scotch would call them, are growling and snapping, and clinking and clattering over our fields, so that it seems to an old boy as if all the sweet poetic twilight of things were vanishing from the country; but he reminds himself that God is not going to sleep, for, as one of the greatest poets that ever lived says, *he slumbereth not nor sleepeth;* and the children of the earth are his, and he will see that their imaginations and feelings have food enough and to spare. It is his business this—not ours. So the work must be done as well as it can. Then, indeed, there will be no fear of the poetry

I have just alluded to the pleasure of riding the horses, that is, the work-horses: upon them Allister and I began to ride, as far as I can remember, this

same summer—not from the plough, for the ploughing was in the end of the year and the spring. First of all we were allowed to take them at watering-time, watched by one of the men, from the stable to the long trough that stood under the pump. There, going hurriedly and stopping suddenly, they would drop head and neck and shoulders like a certain toy-bird, causing the young riders a vague fear of falling over the height no longer defended by the uplifted crest; and then drink and drink till the riders' legs felt the horses' bodies swelling under them; then up and away with quick refreshed stride or trot towards the paradise of their stalls. But for us came first the somewhat fearful pass of the stable-door, for they never stopped, like better educated horses, to let their riders dismount, but walked right in, and there was just room, by stooping low, to clear the top of the door. As we improved in equitation, we would go afield, to ride them home from the pasture, where they were fastened by chains to short stakes of iron driven into the earth. There was more of adventure here, for not only was the ride longer, but the horses were more frisky, and would sometimes set off at the gallop. Then the chief danger was again the door, lest they should dash in, and knock knees against posts and heads against lintels, for we had only halters to hold them with. But after I had once been thrown from back to neck, and from neck to ground in a clumsy but wild gallop extemporized by Dobbin, I was raised to the dignity of a bridle, which I always

carried with me when we went to fetch them. It was my father's express desire that until we could sit well on the bare back we should not be allowed a saddle. It was a whole year before I was permitted to mount his little black riding mare, called Missy. She was old, it is true—nobody quite knew how old she was—but if she felt a light weight on her back, either the spirit of youth was contagious, or she fancied herself as young as when she thought nothing of twelve stone, and would dart off like the wind. In after years I got so fond of her, that I would stand by her side flacking the flies from her as she grazed; and when I tired of that, would clamber upon her back, and lie there reading my book, while she plucked on and ground and mashed away at the grass as if nobody were near her.

Then there was the choice, if nothing else were found more attractive, of going to the field where the cattle were grazing. Oh! the rich hot summer afternoons among the grass and the clover, the little lamb-daisies, and the big horse-daisies, with the cattle feeding solemnly, but one and another straying now to the corn, now to the turnips, and recalled by stern shouts, or, if that were unavailing, by vigorous pursuit and even blows! If I had been able to think of a mother at home, I should have been perfectly happy. Not that I missed her then; I had lost her too young for that. I mean that the memory of the time wants but that to render it perfect in bliss. Even in the cold days of

spring, when, after being shut up all the winter, the cattle were allowed to revel again in the springing grass and the venturesome daisies, there was pleasure enough in the company and devices of the cowherd, a freckle-faced, white-haired, weak-eyed boy of ten, named—I forget his real name: we always called him Turkey, because his nose was the colour of a turkey's egg. Who but Turkey knew mushrooms from toadstools? Who but Turkey could detect earth-nuts—and that with the certainty of a truffle-hunting dog? Who but Turkey knew the note and the form and the nest and the eggs of every bird in the country? Who but Turkey, with his little whip and its lash of brass wire, would encounter the angriest bull in Christendom, provided he carried, like the bulls of Scotland, his most sensitive part, the nose, foremost? In our eyes Turkey was a hero. Who but Turkey could discover the nests of hens whose maternal anxiety had eluded the *finesse* of Kirsty? and who so well as he could roast the egg with which she always rewarded such a discovery? Words are feeble before the delight we experienced on such an occasion, when Turkey, proceeding to light a fire against one of the earthen walls which divided the fields, would send us abroad to gather sticks and straws and whatever outcast combustibles we could find, of which there was a great scarcity, there being no woods or hedges within reach. Who like Turkey could rob a wild bees' nest? And who could be more just than he in distributing the luscious prize? In

fine, his accomplishments were innumerable. Short of flying, we believed him capable of everything imaginable.

What rendered him yet dearer to us, was that there was enmity between him and Mrs. Mitchell. It came about in this way. Although a good milker, and therefore of necessity a good feeder, Hawkie was yet upon temptation subject to the inroads of an unnatural appetite. When she found a piece of an old shoe in the field, she would, if not compelled to drop the delicious mouthful, go on, the whole morning or afternoon, in the impossibility of a final deglutition, chewing and chewing at the savoury morsel. Should this have happened, it was in vain for Turkey to hope escape from the discovery of his inattention, for the milk-pail would that same evening or next morning reveal the fact to Kirsty's watchful eyes. But fortunately for us, in so far as it was well to have an ally against our only enemy, Hawkie's morbid craving was not confined to old shoes. One day when the cattle were feeding close by the manse, she found on the holly-hedge which surrounded it, Mrs. Mitchell's best cap, laid out to bleach in the sun. It was a tempting morsel—more susceptible of mastication than shoe-leather. Mrs. Mitchell, who had gone for another freight of the linen with which she was sprinkling the hedge, arrived only in time to see the end of one of its long strings gradually disappearing into Hawkie's mouth on its way after the rest of the cap, which had gone the length of the string

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ROUND KIRSTY'S FIRE.

further. With a wild cry of despair she flew at Hawkie, so intent on the stolen delicacy as to be more open to a surprise than usual, and laying hold of the string, drew from her throat the deplorable mass of pulp to which she had reduced the valued gaud. The same moment Turkey, who had come running at her cry, received full in his face the slimy and sloppy extract. Nor was this all, for Mrs. Mitchell flew at him in her fury, and with an outburst of abuse boxed his ears soundly, before he could recover his senses sufficiently to run for it. The degradation of this treatment had converted Turkey into an enemy before ever he knew that we also had good grounds for disliking her. His opinion concerning her was freely expressed to us if to no one else, generally in the same terms. He said she was as bad as she was ugly, and always spoke of her as *the old witch.*

But what brought Turkey and us together more than anything else, was that he was as fond of Kirsty's stories as we were; and in the winter especially we would sit together in the evening, as I have already said, round her fire and the great pot upon it full of the most delicious potatoes, while Kirsty knitted away vigorously at her blue broad-ribbed stockings, and kept a sort of time to her story with the sound of her needles. When the story flagged, the needles went slower; in the more animated passages they would become invisible for swiftness, save for a certain shimmering flash that hovered about her fingers like a dim electric play; but

as the story approached some crisis, their motion would at one time become perfectly frantic, at another cease altogether, as finding the subject beyond their power of accompanying expression. When they ceased, we knew that something awful indeed was at hand.

In my next chapter I will give a specimen of her stories, choosing one which bears a little upon an after adventure.

CHAPTER X.

SIR WORM WYMBLE.

IT was a snowy evening in the depth of winter. Kirsty had promised to tell us the tale of the armed knight who lay in stone upon the tomb in the church; but the snow was so deep, that Mrs. Mitchell, always glad when nature put it in her power to exercise her authority in a way disagreeable to us, had refused to let the little ones go out all day. Therefore Turkey and I, when the darkness began to grow thick enough, went prowling and watch-

ing about the manse until we found an opportunity when she was out of the way. The moment this occurred we darted into the nursery, which was on the ground-floor, and catching up my two brothers, I wee Davie, he Allister, we hoisted them on our backs and rushed from the house. It *was* snowing. It came down in huge flakes, but although it was only half-past four o'clock, they did not show any whiteness, for there was no light to shine upon them. You might have thought there had been mud in the cloud they came from, which had turned them all a dark gray. How the little ones did enjoy it, spurring their horses with suppressed laughter, and urging us on lest the old witch should hear and overtake us! But it was hard work for one of the horses, and that was myself. Turkey scudded away with his load, and made nothing of it; but wee Davie pulled so hard with his little arms round my neck, especially when he was bobbing up and down to urge me on, half in delight, half in terror, that he nearly choked me; while if I went one foot off the scarcely beaten path, I sunk deep in the fresh snow.

"Doe on, doe on, Yanal!" cried Davie; and Yanal did his very best, but was only half-way to the farm, when Turkey came bounding back to take Davie from him. In a few moments we had shaken the snow off our shoes and off Davie's back, and stood around Kirsty's "booful baze," as Davie called the fire. Kirsty seated herself on one side with Davie on her lap, and

we three got our chairs as near her as we could, with Turkey, as the valiant man of the party, farthest from the centre of safety, namely Kirsty, who was at the same time to be the source of all the delightful horror. I may as well say that I do not believe Kirsty's tale had the remotest historical connection with Sir Worm Wymble, if that was anything like the name of the dead knight. It was an old Highland legend, which she adorned with the flowers of her own Celtic fancy, and swathed around the form so familiar to us all.

"There is a pot in the Highlands," began Kirsty, "not far from our house, at the bottom of a little glen. It is not very big, but fearfully deep; so deep that they do say there is no bottom to it."

"An iron pot, Kirsty?" asked Allister.

"No, goosey," answered Kirsty. "A pot means a great hole full of water—black, black, and deep, deep."

"Oh!" remarked Allister, and was silent.

"Well, in this pot there lived a kelpie."

"What's a kelpie, Kirsty?" again interposed Allister, who in general asked all the necessary questions and at least as many unnecessary.

"A kelpie is an awful creature that eats people."

"But what is it like, Kirsty?"

"It's something like a horse, with a head like a cow."

"How big is it? As big as Hawkie?"

"Bigger than Hawkie; bigger than the biggest ox you ever saw."

"Has it a great mouth?"

"Yes, a terrible mouth."

"With teeth?"

"Not many, but dreadfully big ones."

"Oh!"

"Well, there was a shepherd many years ago, who lived not far from the pot. He was a knowing man, and understood all about kelpies and brownies and fairies. And he put a branch of the rowan-tree (*mountain-ash*), with the red berries in it, over the door of his cottage, so that the kelpie could never come in.

"Now, the shepherd had a very beautiful daughter —so beautiful that the kelpie wanted very much to eat her. I suppose he had lifted up his head out of the pot some day and seen her go past, but he could not come out of the pot except after the sun was down."

"Why?" asked Allister.

"I don't know. It was the nature of the beast. His eyes couldn't bear the light, I suppose; but he could see in the dark quite well.—One night the girl woke suddenly, and saw his great head looking in at her window."

"But how could she see him when it was dark?" said Allister.

"His eyes were flashing so that they lighted up all his head," answered Kirsty.

"But he couldn't get in!"

"No; he couldn't get in. He was only looking in, and thinking how he *should* like to eat her. So in the

morning she told her father. And her father was very frightened, and told her she must never be out one moment after the sun was down. And for a long time the girl was very careful. And she had need to be; for the creature never made any noise, but came up as quiet as a shadow. One afternoon, however, she had gone to meet her lover a little way down the glen; and they stopped talking so long, about one thing and another, that the sun was almost set before she bethought herself. She said good-night at once, and ran for home. Now she could not reach home without passing the pot, and just as she passed the pot, she saw the last sparkle of the sun as he went down."

"I should think she ran!" remarked our mouthpiece, Allister.

"She did run," said Kirsty, "and had just got past the awful black pot, which was terrible enough day or night without such a beast in it, when——"

"But there *was* the beast in it," said Allister.

"When," Kirsty went on without heeding him, "she heard a great *whish* of water behind her. That was the water tumbling off the beast's back as he came up from the bottom. If she ran before, she flew now. And the worst of it was that she couldn't hear him behind her, so as to tell whereabouts he was. He might be just opening his mouth to take her every moment. At last she reached the door, which her father, who had gone out to look for her, had set wide open that she might run in at once; but all the breath

was out of her body, and she fell down flat just as she got inside."

Here Allister jumped from his seat, clapping his hands and crying—

"Then the kelpie didn't eat her!—Kirsty! Kirsty!"

"No. But as she fell, one foot was left outside the threshold, so that the rowan branch could not take care of it. And the beast laid hold of the foot with his great mouth, to drag her out of the cottage and eat her at his leisure."

Here Allister's face was a picture to behold! His hair was almost standing on end, his mouth was open, and his face as white as my paper.

"Make haste, Kirsty," said Turkey, "or Allister will go in a fit."

"But her shoe came off in his mouth, and she drew in her foot and was safe."

Allister's hair subsided. He drew a deep breath, and sat down again. But Turkey must have been a very wise or a very unimaginative Turkey, for here he broke in with—

"I don't believe a word of it, Kirsty."

"What!" said Kirsty—"don't believe it!"

"No. She lost her shoe in the mud. It was some wild duck she heard in the pot, and there was no beast after her. She never saw it, you know."

"She saw it look in at her window."

"Yes, yes. That was in the middle of the night. I've seen as much myself when I waked up in the

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NELLY'S ESCAPE FROM THE KELPIE.

middle of the night. I took a rat for a tiger once."

Kirsty was looking angry, and her needles were going even faster than when she approached the climax of the shoe.

"Hold your tongue, Turkey," I said, "and let us hear the rest of the story."

But Kirsty kept her eyes on her knitting, and did not resume.

"Is that all, Kirsty?" said Allister.

Still Kirsty returned no answer. She needed all her force to overcome the anger she was busy stifling. For it would never do for one in her position to lose her temper because of the unbelieving criticism of a herd-boy. It was a curious instance of the electricity flashed out in the confluence of unlike things—the Celtic faith and the Saxon works. For anger is just the electric flash of the mind, and requires to have its conductor of common sense ready at hand. After a few moments she began again as if she had never stopped and no remarks had been made, only her voice trembled a little at first.

"Her father came home soon after, in great distress, and there he found her lying just within the door. He saw at once how it was, and his anger was kindled against her lover more than the beast. Not that he had any objection to her going to meet him; for although he was a gentleman and his daughter only a

shepherd's daughter, they were both of the blood of the MacLeods."

This was Kirsty's own clan. And indeed I have since discovered that the original legend on which her story was founded belongs to the island of Rasay, from which she came.

"But why was he angry with the gentleman?" asked Allister.

"Because he liked her company better than he loved herself," said Kirsty. "At least that was what the shepherd said, and that he ought to have seen her safe home. But he didn't know that MacLeod's father had threatened to kill him if ever he spoke to the girl again."

"But," said Allister, "I thought it was about Sir Worm Wymble—not Mr. MacLeod."

"Sure, boy, and am I not going to tell you how he got the new name of him?" returned Kirsty, with an eagerness that showed her fear lest the spirit of inquiry should spread. "He wasn't Sir Worm Wymble then. His name was——"

Here she paused a moment, and looked full at Allister.

"His name was Allister—Allister MacLeod."

"Allister!" exclaimed my brother, repeating the name as an incredible coincidence.

"Yes, Allister," said Kirsty. "There 's been many an Allister, and not all of them MacLeods, that did what they ought to do, and didn't know what fear was.

And you 'll be another, my bonny Allister, I hope," she added, stroking the boy's hair.

Allister's face flushed with pleasure. It was long before he asked another question.

"Well, as I say," resumed Kirsty, "the father of her was very angry, and said she should never go and meet Allister again. But the girl said she ought to go once and let him know why she could not come any more; for she had no complaint to make of Allister; and she had agreed to meet him on a certain day the week after; and there was no post-office in those parts. And so she did meet him, and told him all about it. And Allister said nothing much then. But next day he came striding up to the cottage, at dinner time, with his claymore *(gladius major)* at one side, his dirk at the other, and his little skene dubh *(black knife)* in his stocking. And he was grand to see—such a big strong gentleman! And he came striding up to the cottage where the shepherd was sitting at his dinner.

"'Angus MacQueen,' says he, 'I understand the kelpie in the pot has been rude to your Nelly. I am going to kill him.' 'How will you do that, sir?' said Angus, quite short, for he was the girl's father. 'Here 's a claymore I could put in a peck,' said Allister, meaning it was such good steel that he could bend it round till the hilt met the point without breaking; 'and here 's a shield made out of the hide of old Rasay's black bull; and here 's a dirk made of a foot and a half of an old Andrew Ferrara; and here 's a skene dubh that

I'll drive through your door, Mr. Angus. And so we're fitted, I hope.' 'Not at all,' said Angus, who as I told you was a wise man and a knowing; 'not one bit,' said Angus. 'The kelpie's hide is thicker than three bull-hides, and none of your weapons would do more than mark it.' 'What am I to do then, Angus, for kill him I will somehow?' 'I'll tell you what to do; but it needs a brave man to do that.' 'And do you think I'm not brave enough for that, Angus?' 'I know one thing you are not brave enough for.' 'And what's that?' said Allister, and his face grew red, only he did not want to anger Nelly's father. 'You're not brave enough to marry my girl in the face of the clan,' said Angus. 'But you shan't go on this way. If my Nelly's good enough to talk to in the glen, she's good enough to lead into the hall before the ladies and gentlemen.'

"Then Allister's face grew redder still, but not with anger, and he held down his head before the old man, but only for a few moments. When he lifted it again, it was pale, not with fear but with resolution, for he had made up his mind like a gentleman. 'Mr. Angus MacQueen,' he said, 'will you give me your daughter to be my wife?' 'If you kill the kelpie, I will,' answered Angus; for he knew that the man who could do that would be worthy of his Nelly."

"But what if the kelpie ate him?" suggested Allister.

"Then he'd have to go without the girl," said Kirsty, coolly. "But," she resumed, "there's always some

way of doing a difficult thing; and Allister, the gentleman, had Angus, the shepherd, to teach him.

"So Angus took Allister down to the pot, and there they began. They tumbled great stones together, and set them up in two rows at a little distance from each other, making a lane between the rows big enough for the kelpie to walk in. If the kelpie heard them, he could not see them, and they took care to get into the cottage before it was dark, for they could not finish their preparations in one day. And they sat up all night, and saw the huge head of the beast looking in now at one window, now at another, all night long. As soon as the sun was up, they set to work again, and finished the two rows of stones all the way from the pot to the top of the little hill on which the cottage stood. Then they tied a cross of rowan-tree twigs on every stone, so that once the beast was in the avenue of stones he could only get out at the end. And this was Nelly's part of the job. Next they gathered a quantity of furze and brushwood and peat, and piled it in the end of the avenue next the cottage. Then Angus went and killed a little pig, and dressed it ready for cooking.

"'Now you go down to my brother Hamish,' he said to Mr. MacLeod; 'he's a carpenter, you know,—and ask him to lend you his longest wimble.'"

"What's a wimble?" asked little Allister.

"A wimble is a long tool, like a great gimlet, with a cross handle, with which you turn it like a screw.

And Allister ran and fetched it, and got back only half an hour before the sun went down. Then they put Nelly into the cottage, and shut the door. But I ought to have told you that they had built up a great heap of stones behind the brushwood, and now they lighted the brushwood, and put down the pig to roast by the fire, and laid the wimble in the fire halfway up to the handle. Then they laid themselves down behind the heap of stones, and waited.

"By the time the sun was out of sight, the smell of the roasting pig had got down the avenue to the side of the pot, just where the kelpie always got out. He smelt it the moment he put up his head, and he thought it smelt so nice that he would go and see where it was. The moment he got out he was between the stones, but he never thought of that, for it was the straight way to the pig. So up the avenue he came, and as it was dark, and his big soft web feet made no noise, the men could not see him until he came into the light of the fire. 'There he is!' said Allister. 'Hush!' said Angus, 'he can hear well enough.' So the beast came on. Now Angus had meant that he should be busy with the pig before Allister should attack him; but Allister thought it was a pity he should have the pig, and he put out his hand and got hold of the wimble, and drew it gently out of the fire. And the wimble was so hot that it was as white as the whitest moon you ever saw. The pig was so hot also that the brute was afraid to touch it, and before ever he put his nose to

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WAITING FOR THE KELPIE.

it Allister had thrust the wimble into his hide, behind the left shoulder, and was boring away with all his might. The kelpie gave a hideous roar, and turned away to run from the wimble. But he could not get over the row of crossed stones, and he had to turn right round in the narrow space before he could run. Allister, however, could run as well as the kelpie, and he hung on to the handle of the wimble, giving it another turn at every chance as the beast went floundering on; so that before he reached his pot the wimble had reached his heart, and the kelpie fell dead on the edge of the pot. Then they went home, and when the pig was properly done they had it for supper. And Angus gave Nelly to Allister, and they were married, and lived happily ever after."

"But didn't Allister's father kill him?"

"No. He thought better of it, and didn't. He was very angry for a while, but he got over it in time. And Allister became a great man, and because of what he had done, he was called Allister MacLeod no more, but Sir Worm Wymble. And when he died," concluded Kirsty, "he was buried under the tomb in your father's church. And if you look close enough, you'll find a wimble carved on the stone, but I 'm afraid it 's worn out by this time."

CHAPTER XI.

THE KELPIE.

SILENCE followed the close of Kirsty's tale. Wee Davie had taken no harm, for he was fast asleep with his head on her bosom. Allister was staring into the fire, fancying he saw the whorls of the wimble heating in it. Turkey was cutting at his stick with a blunt pocket-knife, and a silent whistle on his puckered lips. I was sorry the story was over, and was growing stupid under the reaction from its excitement. I was, however, meditating a strict search for the wimble carved on the knight's tomb. All at once came the sound of a latch lifted in vain, followed by a thundering at the outer door, which Kirsty had prudently locked. Allister, Turkey, and I started to our feet, Allister with a cry of dismay, Turkey grasping his stick.

"It 's the kelpie!" cried Allister.

But the harsh voice of the old witch followed, something deadened by the intervening door.

"Kirsty! Kirsty!" it cried; "open the door directly."

"No, no, Kirsty!" I objected. "She 'll shake wee

Davie to bits, and haul Allister through the snow. She 's afraid to touch me."

Turkey thrust the poker in the fire; but Kirsty snatched it out, threw it down, and boxed his ears, which rough proceeding he took with the pleasantest laugh in the world. Kirsty could do what she pleased, for she was no tyrant. She turned to us.

"Hush!" she said, hurriedly, with a twinkle in her eyes that showed the spirit of fun was predominant—"Hush!—Don't speak, wee Davie," she continued, as she rose and carried him from the kitchen into the passage between it and the outer door. He was scarcely awake.

Now, in that passage, which was wide, and indeed more like a hall in proportion to the cottage, had stood on its end from time immemorial a huge barrel, which Kirsty, with some housewifely intent or other, had lately cleaned out. Setting Davie down, she and Turkey lifted first me and popped me into it, and then Allister, for we caught the design at once. Finally she took up wee Davie, and, telling him to lie as still as a mouse, dropped him into our arms. I happened to find the open bung-hole near my eye, and peeped out. The knocking continued.

"Wait a bit, Mrs. Mitchell," screamed Kirsty; "wait till I get my potatoes off the fire."

As she spoke, she took the great bow-pot in one hand and carried it to the door, to pour away the water. When she unlocked and opened the door, I

saw through the bung-hole a lovely sight; for the moon was shining, and the snow was falling thick. In the midst of it stood Mrs. Mitchell, one mass of whiteness. She would have rushed in, but Kirsty's advance with the pot made her give way, and from behind Kirsty Turkey slipped out and round the corner without being seen. There he stood watching, but busy at the same time kneading snow-balls.

"And what may you please to want to-night, Mrs. Mitchell?" said Kirsty, with great civility.

"What should I want but my poor children? They ought to have been in bed an hour ago. Really, Kirsty, you ought to have more sense at your years than to encourage any such goings on."

"At my years!" returned Kirsty, and was about to give a sharp retort, but checked herself, saying, "Aren't they in bed then, Mrs. Mitchell?"

"You know well enough they are not."

"Poor things! I would recommend you to put them to bed at once."

"So I will. Where are they?"

"Find them yourself, Mrs. Mitchell. You had better ask a civil tongue to help you. I 'm not going to do it."

They were standing just inside the door. Mrs. Mitchell advanced. I trembled. It seemed impossible she should not see me as well as I saw her. I had a vague impression that by looking at her I should draw her eyes upon me; but I could not withdraw

mine from the bung-hole. I was fascinated; and the nearer she came, the less could I keep from watching her. When she turned into the kitchen, it was a great relief; but it did not last long, for she came out again in a moment, searching like a hound. She was taller than Kirsty, and by standing on her tiptoes could have looked right down into the barrel. She was approaching it with that intent—those eyes were about to overshadow us with their baleful light. Already her apron hid all other vision from my one eye, when a whizz, a dull blow, and a shriek from Mrs. Mitchell came to my ears together. The next moment, the field of my vision was open, and I saw Mrs. Mitchell holding her head with both hands, and the face of Turkey grinning round the corner of the open door. Evidently he wanted to entice her to follow him; but she had been too much astonished by the snow-ball in the back of her neck even to look in the direction whence the blow had come. So Turkey stepped out, and was just poising himself in the delivery of a second missile, when she turned sharp round.

The snow-ball missed her, and came with a great bang against the barrel. Wee Davie gave a cry of alarm, but there was no danger now, for Mrs. Mitchell was off after Turkey. In a moment, Kirsty lowered the barrel on its side, and we all crept out. I had wee Davie on my back instantly, while Kirsty caught up Allister, and we were off for the manse. As soon as we were out of the yard, however, we met Turkey,

breathless. He had given Mrs. Mitchell the slip, and left her searching the barn for him. He took Allister from Kirsty, and we sped away, for it was all down hill now. When Mrs. Mitchell got back to the farm-house, Kirsty was busy as if nothing had happened, and when, after a fruitless search, she returned to the manse, we were all snug in bed, with the door locked. After what had passed about the school, Mrs. Mitchell did not dare make any disturbance.

From that night she always went by the name of *the Kelpie.*

CHAPTER XII.

ANOTHER KELPIE.

IN the summer we all slept in a large room in the wide sloping roof. It had a dormer-window, at no great distance above the eaves. One day there was something doing about the ivy, which covered all the gable and half the front of the house, and the ladder they had been using was left leaning against the back. It reached a little above the eaves, right under the dormer-window. That night I could not sleep, as was not unfrequently the case with me. On such occasions I used to go wandering about the upper part of the house. I believe the servants thought I walked in my sleep, but it was not so, for I always knew what I was about well enough. I do not remember whether this began after that dreadful night when I woke in the barn, but I do think the enjoyment it gave me was rooted in the starry loneliness in which I had then found myself. I wonder if I can explain my feelings. The pleasure arose from a sort of sense of protected danger. On that memorable night, I had been as it were naked to all the silence, alone in the vast uni-

verse, which kept looking at me full of something it knew but would not speak. Now, when wandering about sleepless, I could gaze as from a nest of safety out upon the beautiful fear. From window to window I would go in the middle of the night, now staring into a blank darkness out of which came, the only signs of its being, the rain-drops that bespattered or the hail-stones that berattled the panes; now gazing into the deeps of the blue vault, gold-bespangled with its worlds; or, again, into the mysteries of soft clouds, all gathered into an opal tent by the centre-clasp of the moon, thinking out her light over its shining and shadowy folds.

This, I have said, was one of those nights on which I could not sleep. It was the summer after the winter-story of the kelpie, I believe; but the past is confused, and its chronology worthless, to the continuous *now* of childhood. The night was hot; my little brothers were sleeping loud, as wee Davie called *snoring;* and a great moth had got within my curtains somewhere, and kept on fluttering and whirring. I got up, and went to the window. It was such a night! The moon was full, but rather low, and looked just as if she were thinking—"Nobody is heeding me: I may as well go to bed." All the top of the sky was covered with mackerel-backed clouds, lying like milky ripples on a blue sea, and through them the stars shot, here and there, sharp little rays like sparkling diamonds. There was no awfulness about it, as on the night when the

gulfy sky stood over me, flashing with the heavenly host, and nothing was between me and the farthest world. The clouds were like the veil that hid the terrible light in the Holy of Holies—a curtain of God's love, to dim with loveliness the grandeur of their own being, and make his children able to bear it. My eye fell upon the top rounds of the ladder, which rose above the edge of the roof like an invitation. I opened the window, crept through, and, holding on by the ledge, let myself down over the slates, feeling with my feet for the top of the ladder. In a moment I was upon it. Down I went, and oh, how tender to my bare feet was the cool grass on which I alighted! I looked up. The dark house-wall rose above me. I could ascend again when I pleased. There was no hurry. I would walk about a little. I would put my place of refuge yet a little further off, nibble at the danger, as it were—a danger which existed only in my imagination. I went outside the high holly hedge, and the house was hidden. A grassy field was before me, and just beyond the field rose the farm-buildings. Why should not I run across and wake Turkey? I was off like a shot, the expectation of a companion in my delight overcoming all the remnants of lingering apprehension. I knew there was only one bolt, and that a manageable one, between me and Turkey, for he slept in a little wooden chamber partitioned off from a loft in the barn, to which he had to climb a ladder. The only fearful part was the crossing of the

barn-floor. But I was man enough for that. I reached and crossed the yard in safety, searched for and found the key of the barn, which was always left in a hole in the wall by the door,—turned it in the lock, and crossed the floor as fast as the darkness would allow me. With outstretched groping hands I found the ladder, ascended, and stood by Turkey's bed.

"Turkey! Turkey! wake up," I cried. "It's such a beautiful night! It's a shame to lie sleeping that way."

Turkey's answer was immediate. He was wide awake and out of bed with all his wits by him in a moment.

"Sh! sh!" he said, "or you'll wake Oscar."

Oscar was a colley *(sheep-dog)* which slept in a kennel in the corn-yard. He was not much of a watch-dog, for there was no great occasion for watching, and he knew it, and slept like a human child; but he was the most knowing of dogs. Turkey was proceeding to dress.

"Never mind your clothes, Turkey," I said. "There's nobody up."

Willing enough to spare himself trouble, Turkey followed me in his shirt. But once we were out in the corn-yard, instead of finding contentment in the sky and the moon, as I did, he wanted to know what we were going to do.

"It's not a bad sort of night," he said; "what shall we do with it?"

He was always wanting to do something.

"Oh, nothing," I answered; "only look about us a bit."

"You didn't hear robbers, did you?" he asked.

"Oh dear, no! I couldn't sleep, and got down the ladder, and came to wake you—that's all."

"Let's have a walk, then," he said.

Now that I had Turkey, there was scarcely more terror in the night than in the day. I consented at once. That we had no shoes on was not of the least consequence to Scotch boys. I often, and Turkey always, went barefooted in summer.

As we left the barn, Turkey had caught up his little whip. He was never to be seen without either that or his club, as we called the stick he carried when he was herding the cattle. Finding him thus armed, I begged him to give me his club. He ran and fetched it, and, thus equipped, we set out for nowhere in the middle of the night. My fancy was full of fragmentary notions of adventure, in which shadows from The Pilgrim's Progress predominated. I shouldered my club, trying to persuade my imagination that the unchristian weapon had been won from some pagan giant, and therefore was not unfittingly carried. But Turkey was far better armed with his lash of wire than I was with the club. His little whip was like that fearful weapon called the morning star in the hand of some stalwart knight.

We took our way towards the nearest hills, thinking little of where we went so that we were in motion. I

guess that the story I have just related must, notwithstanding his unbelief, have been working in Turkey's brain that night, for after we had walked for a mile or more along the road, and had arrived at the foot of a wooded hill, well known to all the children of the neighbourhood for its bilberries, he turned into the hollow of a broken track, which lost itself in a field as yet only half-redeemed from the moorland. It was plain to me now that Turkey had some goal or other in his view; but I followed his leading, and asked no questions. All at once he stopped, and said, pointing a few yards in front of him:

"Look, Ranald!"

I did look, but the moon was behind the hill, and the night was so dim that I had to keep looking for several moments ere I discovered that he was pointing to the dull gleam of dark water. Very horrible it seemed. I felt my flesh creep the instant I saw it. It lay in a hollow left by the digging out of peats, drained thither from the surrounding bog. My heart sank with fear. The almost black glimmer of its surface was bad enough, but who could tell what lay in its unknown depth? But, as I gazed, almost paralysed, a huge dark figure rose up on the opposite side of the pool. For one moment the scepticism of Turkey seemed to fail him, for he cried out, "The kelpie! The kelpie!" and turned and ran.

I followed as fast as feet utterly unconscious of the ground they trod upon could bear me. We had not

gone many yards before a great roar filled the silent air. That moment Turkey slackened his pace, and burst into a fit of laughter.

"It's nothing but Bogbonny's bull, Ranald!" he cried.

Kelpies were unknown creatures to Turkey, but a bull was no more than a dog or a sheep, or any other domestic animal. I, however, did not share his equanimity, and never slackened my pace till I got up with him.

"But he's rather ill-natured," he went on, the instant I joined him, "and we had better make for the hill."

Another roar was a fresh spur to our speed. We could not have been in better trim for running. But it was all up hill, and had it not been that the ground for some distance between us and the animal was boggy, so that he had to go round a good way, one of us at least would have been in evil case.

"He's caught sight of our shirts," said Turkey, panting as he ran, "and he wants to see what they are. But we'll be over the fence before he comes up with us. I wouldn't mind for myself; I could dodge him well enough; but he might go after you, Ranald."

What with fear and exertion I was unable to reply. Another bellow sounded nearer, and by and by we could hear the dull stroke of his hoofs on the soft ground as he galloped after us. But the fence of dry stones, and the larch wood within it, were close at hand.

"Over with you, Ranald!" cried Turkey, as if with his last breath; and turned at bay, for the brute was close behind him.

But I was so spent, I could not climb the wall; and when I saw Turkey turn and face the bull, I turned too. We were now in the shadow of the hill, but I could just see Turkey lift his arm. A short sharp hiss, and a roar followed. The bull tossed his head as in pain, left Turkey, and came towards me. He could not charge at any great speed, for the ground was steep and uneven. I, too, had kept hold of my weapon; and although I was dreadfully frightened, I felt my courage rise at Turkey's success, and lifted my club in the hope that it might prove as good at need as Turkey's whip. It was well for me, however, that Turkey was too quick for the bull. He got between him and me, and a second stinging cut from the brass wire drew a second roar from his throat, and no doubt a second red streamlet from his nose, while my club descended on one of his horns with a bang which jarred my arm to the elbow, and sent the weapon flying over the fence. The animal turned tail for a moment—long enough to place us, enlivened by our success, on the other side of the wall, where we crouched so that he could not see us. Turkey, however, kept looking up at the line of the wall against the sky; and as he looked, over came the nose of the bull, within a yard of his head. Hiss went the little whip, and bellow went the bull.

"Get up among the trees, Ranald, for fear he come over," said Turkey, in a whisper.

I obeyed. But as he could see nothing of his foes, the animal had had enough of it, and we heard no more of him.

After a while, Turkey left his lair and joined me. We rested for a little, and would then have clambered to the top of the hill, but we gave up the attempt as awkward after getting into a furze bush. In our condition, it was too dark. I began to grow sleepy, also, and thought I should like to exchange the hill-side for my bed. Turkey make no objection, so we trudged home again; not without sundry starts and quick glances to make sure that the bull was neither after us on the road, nor watching us from behind this bush or that hillock. Turkey never left me till he saw me safe up the ladder; nay, after I was in bed, I spied his face peeping in at the window from the topmost round of it. By this time the east had begun to begin to glow, as Allister, who was painfully exact, would have said; but I was fairly tired now, and, falling asleep at once, never woke until Mrs. Mitchell pulled the clothes off me, an indignity which I keenly felt, but did not yet know how to render impossible for the future.

CHAPTER XIII.

WANDERING WILLIE.

AT that time there were a good many beggars going about the country, who lived upon the alms of the charitable. Among these were some half-witted persons, who, although not to be relied upon, were seldom to any extent mischievous. We were not much afraid of them, for the home-neighbourhood is a charmed spot round which has been drawn a magic circle of safety, and we seldom roamed far beyond it. There was, however, one occasional visitor of this class, of whom

we stood in some degree of awe. He was commonly styled Foolish Willie. His approach to the manse was always announced by a wailful strain upon the bagpipes, a set of which he had inherited from his father, who had been piper to some Highland nobleman: at least so it was said. Willie never went without his pipes, and was more attached to them than to any living creature. He played them well, too, though in what corner he kept the amount of intellect necessary to the mastery of them was a puzzle. The probability seemed that his wits had not decayed until after he had become in a measure proficient in the use of the chanter, as they call that pipe by means of whose perforations the notes are regulated. However this may be, Willie could certainly play the pipes, and was a great favourite because of it—with children especially, notwithstanding the mixture of fear which his presence always occasioned them. Whether it was from our Highland blood or from Kirsty's stories, I do not know, but we were always delighted when the far-off sound of his pipes reached us: little Davie would dance and shout with glee. Even the Kelpie, Mrs. Mitchell that is, was benignantly inclined towards Wandering Willie, as some people called him after the old song; so much so that Turkey, who always tried to account for things, declared his conviction that Willie must be Mrs. Mitchell's brother, only she was ashamed and wouldn't own him. I do not believe he had the smallest atom of corroboration for the con-

jecture, which therefore was bold and worthy of the inventor. One thing we all knew, that she would ostentatiously fill the canvas bag which he carried by his side, with any broken scraps she could gather, would give him as much milk to drink as he pleased, and would speak kind, almost coaxing, words to the poor *natural*—words which sounded the stranger in our ears, that they were quite unused to like sounds from the lips of the Kelpie.

It is impossible to describe Willie's dress: the agglomeration of ill-supplied necessity and superfluous whim was never exceeded. His pleasure was to pin on his person whatever gay-coloured cotton handkerchiefs he could get hold of; so that, with one of these behind and one before, spread out across back and chest, he always looked like an ancient herald come with a message from knight or nobleman. So incongruous was his costume that I could never tell whether kilt or trousers was the original foundation upon which it had been constructed. To his tatters add the bits of old ribbon, list, and coloured rag which he attached to his pipes wherever there was room, and you will see that he looked all flags and pennons—a moving grove of raggery, out of which came the screaming chant and drone of his instrument. When he danced, he was like a whirlwind that had caught up the contents of an old-clothes-shop. It is no wonder that he should have produced in our minds an indescribable mixture of awe and delight—awe, because no one could tell what

he might do next, and delight because of his oddity, agility, and music. The first sensation was always a slight fear, which gradually wore off as we became anew accustomed to the strangeness of the apparition. Before the visit was over, Wee Davie would be playing with the dangles of his pipes, and laying his ear to the bag out of which he thought the music came ready-made. And Willie was particularly fond of Davie, and tried to make himself agreeable to him after a hundred grotesque fashions. The awe, however, was constantly renewed in his absence, partly by the threats of the Kelpie, that, if so and so, she would give this one or that to Foolish Willie to take away with him—a threat which now fell almost powerless upon me, but still told upon Allister and Davie.

One day, in early summer—it was after I had begun to go to school—I came home as usual at five o'clock, to find the manse in great commotion. Wee Davie had disappeared. They were looking for him everywhere without avail. Already all the farm-houses had been thoroughly searched. An awful horror fell upon me, and the most frightful ideas of Davie's fate arose in my mind. I remember giving a howl of dismay the moment I heard of the catastrophe, for which I received a sound box on the ear from Mrs. Mitchell. I was too miserable, however, to show any active resentment, and only sat down upon the grass and cried. In a few minutes, my father, who had been away visiting some of his parishioners, rode up on his little black

mare. Mrs. Mitchell hurried to meet him, wringing her hands, and crying—

"Oh, sir! oh, sir! Davie's away with Foolish Willie!"

This was the first I had heard of Willie in connection with the affair. My father turned pale, but kept perfectly quiet.

"Which way did he go?" he asked.

Nobody knew.

"How long is it ago?"

"About an hour and a half, I think," said Mrs. Mitchell.

To me the news was some relief. Now I could at least do something. I left the group, and hurried away to find Turkey. Except my father, I trusted more in Turkey than in any one. I got on a rising ground near the manse, and looked all about until I found where the cattle were feeding that afternoon, and then darted off at full speed. They were at some distance from home, and I found that Turkey had heard nothing of the mishap. When I had succeeded in conveying the dreadful news, he shouldered his club, and said—

"The cows must look after themselves, Ranald!"

With the words he set off at a good swinging trot in the direction of a little rocky knoll in a hollow about half a mile away, which he knew to be a favourite haunt of Wandering Willie, as often as he came into the neighbourhood. On this knoll grew some stunted

trees, gnarled and old, with very mossy stems. There was moss on the stones too, and between them grew lovely harebells, and at the foot of the knoll there were always in the season tall foxgloves, which had imparted a certain fear to the spot in my fancy. For there they call them *Dead Man's Bells*, and I thought there was a murdered man buried somewhere thereabout. I should not have liked to be there alone even in the broad daylight. But with Turkey I would have gone at any hour, even without the impulse which now urged me to follow him at my best speed. There was some marshy ground between us and the knoll, but we floundered through it; and then Turkey, who was some distance ahead of me, dropped into a walk, and began to reconnoitre the knoll with some caution. I soon got up with him.

"He's there, Ranald!" he said.

"Who? Davie?"

"I don't know about Davie; but Willie's there."

"How do you know?"

"I heard his bagpipes grunt. Perhaps Davie sat down upon them."

"Oh, run, Turkey!" I said, eagerly.

"No hurry," he returned. "If Willie has him, he won't hurt him, but it mayn't be easy to get him away. We must creep up and see what can be done."

Half dead as some of the trees were, there was foliage enough upon them to hide Willie, and Turkey hoped it would help to hide our approach. He went

down on his hands and knees, and thus crept towards the knoll, skirting it partly, because a little way round it was steeper. I followed his example, and found I was his match at crawling in four-footed fashion. When we reached the steep side, we lay still and listened.

"He 's there!" I cried in a whisper.

"Sh!" said Turkey; "I hear him. It 's all right. We 'll soon have a hold of him."

A weary whimper as of a child worn out with hopeless crying had reached our ears. Turkey immediately began to climb the side of the knoll.

"Stay where you are, Ranald," he said. "I can go up quieter than you."

I obeyed. Cautious as a deer-stalker, he ascended, still on his hands and knees. I strained my eyes after his every motion. But when he was near the top he lay perfectly quiet, and continued so till I could bear it no longer, and crept up after him. When I came behind him, he looked round angrily, and made a most emphatic contortion of his face; after which I dared not climb to a level with him, but lay trembling with expectation. The next moment I heard him call in a low whisper:

"Davie! Davie! wee Davie!"

But there was no reply. He called a little louder, evidently trying to reach by degrees just the pitch that would pierce to Davie's ears and not arrive at Wandering Willie's, who I rightly presumed was farther off. His tones grew louder and louder—but had not yet

risen above a sharp whisper, when at length a small trembling voice cried "Turkey! Turkey!" in prolonged accents of mingled hope and pain. There was a sound in the bushes above me—a louder sound and a rush. Turkey sprang to his feet and vanished. I followed. Before I reached the top, there came a despairing cry from Davie, and a shout and a gabble from Willie. Then followed a louder shout and a louder gabble, mixed with a scream from the bagpipes, and an exulting laugh from Turkey. All this passed in the moment I spent in getting to the top, the last step of which was difficult. There was Davie alone in the thicket, Turkey scudding down the opposite slope with the bagpipes under his arm, and Wandering Willie pursuing him in a foaming fury. I caught Davie in my arms from where he lay sobbing and crying "Yanal! Yanal!" and stood for a moment not knowing what to do, but resolved to fight with teeth and nails before Willie should take him again. Meantime Turkey led Willie towards the deepest of the boggy ground, in which both were very soon floundering, only Turkey, being the lighter, had the advantage. When I saw that, I resolved to make for home. I got Davie on my back, and slid down the farther side to skirt the bog, for I knew I should stick in it with Davie's weight added to my own. I had not gone far, however, before a howl from Willie made me aware that he had caught sight of us; and, looking round, I saw him turn from Turkey and come after us. Pre-

sently, however, he hesitated, then stopped, and began looking this way and that from the one to the other of his treasures, both in evil hands. Doubtless his indecision would have been very ludicrous to any one who had not such a stake in the turn of the scale. As it was, he made up his mind far too soon, for he chose to follow Davie. I ran my best in the very strength of despair for some distance, but, seeing very soon that I had no chance, I set Davie down, telling him to keep behind me, and prepared, like the Knight of the Red Cross, "sad battle to darrayne." Willie came on in fury, his rags fluttering like ten scarecrows, and he waving his arms in the air, with wild gestures and grimaces and cries and curses. He was more terrible than the bull, and Turkey was behind him. I was just, like a negro, preparing to run my head into the pit of his stomach, and so upset him if I could, when I saw Turkey running towards us at full speed, blowing into the bagpipes as he ran. How he found breath for both I cannot understand. At length, he put the bag under his arm, and forth issued such a combination of screeching and grunting and howling, that Wandering Willie, in the full career of his rage, turned at the cries of his companion. Then came Turkey's masterpiece. He dashed the bagpipes on the ground, and commenced kicking them before him like a football, and the pipes cried out at every kick. If Turkey's first object had been their utter demolition, he could not have treated them more unmercifully. It

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was no time for gentle measures: my life hung in the balance. But this was more than Willie could bear. He turned from us, and once again pursued his pipes. When he had nearly overtaken him, Turkey gave them a last masterly kick, which sent them flying through the air, caught them as they fell, and again sought the bog, while I, hoisting Davie on my back, hurried, with more haste than speed, towards the manse.

What took place after I left them, I have only from Turkey's report, for I never looked behind me till I reached the little green before the house, where, setting Davie down, I threw myself on the grass. I remember nothing more till I came to myself in bed.

When Turkey reached the bog, and had got Wandering Willie well into the middle of it, he threw the bagpipes as far beyond him as he could, and then made his way out. Willie followed the pipes, took them, held them up between him and the sky as if appealing to heaven against the cruelty, then sat down in the middle of the bog upon a solitary hump, and cried like a child. Turkey stood and watched him, at first with feelings of triumph, which by slow degrees cooled down until at length they passed over into compassion, and he grew heartily sorry for the poor fellow, although there was no room for repentance. After Willie had cried for a while, he took the instrument as if it had been the mangled corpse of his son, and proceeded to examine it. Turkey declared his certainty that none of the pipes were broken; but when

at length Willie put the mouthpiece to his lips, and began to blow into the bag, alas! it would hold no wind. He flung it from him in anger and cried again. Turkey left him crying in the middle of the bog. He said it was a pitiful sight.

It was long before Willie appeared in that part of the country again; but, about six months after, some neighbours who had been to a fair twenty miles off, told my father that they had seen him looking much as usual, and playing his pipes with more energy than ever. This was a great relief to my father, who could not bear the idea of the poor fellow's loneliness without his pipes, and had wanted very much to get them repaired for him. But ever after my father showed a great regard for Turkey. I heard him say once that, if he had had the chance, Turkey would have made a great general. That he should be judged capable of so much, was not surprising to me; yet he became in consequence a still greater being in my eyes.

When I set Davie down, and fell myself on the grass, there was nobody near. Every one was engaged in a new search for Davie. My father had rode off at once without dismounting, to inquire at the neighbouring toll-gate whether Willie had passed through. It was not very likely, for such wanderers seldom take to the hard high road; but he could think of nothing else, and it was better to do something. Having failed there, he had returned and ridden along the country

road which passed the farm towards the hills, leaving Willie and Davie far behind him. It was twilight before he returned. How long, therefore, I lay upon the grass, I do not know. When I came to myself, I found a sharp pain in my side. Turn how I would, there it was, and I could draw but a very short breath for it. I was in my father's bed, and there was no one in the room. I lay for some time in increasing pain; but in a little while my father came in, and then I felt that all was as it should be. Seeing me awake, he approached with an anxious face.

"Is Davie all right, father?" I asked.

"He is quite well, Ranald, my boy. How do you feel yourself now?"

"I 've been asleep, father?"

"Yes; we found you on the grass, with Davie pulling at you and trying to wake you, crying, 'Yanal won't peak to me. Yanal! Yanal!' I am afraid you had a terrible run with him. Turkey, as you call him, told me all about it. He 's a fine lad, Turkey!"

"Indeed he is, father!" I cried with a gasp which betrayed my suffering.

"What is the matter, my boy?" he asked.

"Lift me up a little, please," I said, "I have *such* a pain in my side!"

"Ah!" he said, "it catches your breath. We must send for the old doctor."

The old doctor was a sort of demigod in the place. Everybody believed and trusted in him; and nobody

could die in peace without him any more than without my father. I was delighted at the thought of being his patient. I think I see him now standing with his back to the fire, and taking his lancet from his pocket, while preparations were being made for bleeding me at the arm, which was a far commoner operation then than it is now.

That night I was delirious, and haunted with bagpipes. Wandering Willie was nowhere, but the atmosphere was full of bagpipes. It was an unremitting storm of bagpipes—silent, but assailing me bodily from all quarters—now small as motes in the sun, and hailing upon me; now large as feather-beds, and ready to bang us about, only they never touched us; now huge as Mount Ætna, and threatening to smother us beneath their ponderous bulk; for all the time I was toiling on with little Davie on my back. Next day I was a little better, but very weak, and it was many days before I was able to get out of bed. My father soon found that it would not do to let Mrs. Mitchell attend upon me, for I was always worse after she had been in the room for any time; so he got another woman to take Kirsty's duties, and set her to nurse me, after which illness became almost a luxury. With Kirsty near, nothing could go wrong. And the growing better was pure enjoyment.

Once, when Kirsty was absent for a little while, Mrs. Mitchell brought me some gruel.

"The gruel's not nice," I said.

"It's perfectly good, Ranald, and there's no merit

in complaining when everybody's trying to make you as comfortable as they can," said the Kelpie.

"Let me taste it," said Kirsty, who that moment entered the room.—"It's not fit for anybody to eat," she said, and carried it away, Mrs. Mitchell following her with her nose horizontal.

Kirsty brought the basin back full of delicious gruel, well boiled, and supplemented with cream. I am sure the way in which she transformed that basin of gruel has been a lesson to me ever since as to the quality of the work I did. No boy or girl can have a much better lesson than—to do what must be done as well as it can be done. Everything, the commonest, well done, is something for the progress of the world; that is, lessens, if by the smallest hair's-breadth, the distance between it and God.

Oh, what a delight was that first glowing summer afternoon upon which I was carried out to the field where Turkey was herding the cattle! I could not yet walk. That very morning, as I was being dressed by Kirsty, I had insisted that I could walk quite well, and Kirsty had been over-persuaded into letting me try. Not feeling steady on my legs, I set off running, but tumbled on my knees by the first chair I came near. I was so light from the wasting of my illness, that Kirsty herself, little woman as she was, was able to carry me. I remember well how I saw everything double that day, and found it at first very amusing. Kirsty set me down on a plaid in the grass, and the

next moment, Turkey, looking awfully big, and portentously healthy, stood by my side. I wish I might give the conversation in the dialect of my native country, for it loses much in translation; but I have promised, and I will keep my promise.

"Eh, Ranald!" said Turkey, "it's not yourself?"

"It's me, Turkey," I said, nearly crying with pleasure.

"Never mind, Ranald," he returned, as if consoling me in some disappointment; "we'll have rare fun yet."

"I'm frightened at the cows, Turkey. Don't let them come near me."

"No, that I won't," answered Turkey, brandishing his club to give me confidence. "*I'll* give it them, if they look at you from between their ugly horns."

"Turkey," I said, for I had often pondered the matter during my illness, "how did Hawkie behave while you were away with me—that day, you know?"

"She ate about half a rick of green corn," answered Turkey, coolly. "But she had the worst of it. They had to make a hole in her side, or she would have died. There she is—off to the turnips!"

He was after her with shout and flourish. Hawkie heard and obeyed, turning round on her hind-legs with a sudden start, for she knew from his voice that he was in a dangerously energetic mood.

"You'll be all right again soon," he said, coming quietly back to me. Kirsty had gone to the farm

house, leaving me with injunctions to Turkey concerning me.

"Oh yes, I 'm nearly well now; only I can't walk yet."

"Will you come on my back?" he said.

When Kirsty returned to take me home, there was I following the cows on Turkey's back, riding him about wherever I chose; for my horse was obedient as only a dog, or a horse, or a servant from love can be. From that day I recovered very rapidly.

CHAPTER XIV.

ELSIE DUFF.

HOW all the boys and girls stared at me, as timidly, yet with a sense of importance derived from the distinction of having been so ill, I entered the parish school one morning, about ten o'clock! For as I said before, I had gone to school for some months before I was taken ill. It was a very different affair from Dame Shand's tyrannical little kingdom. Here were boys of all ages, and girls likewise, ruled over by an energetic young man, with a touch of genius, manifested chiefly in an enthusiasm for teaching. He had spoken to me kindly the first day I went, and had so secured my attachment that it never wavered, not even when, once, supposing me guilty of a certain breach of orders committed by my next neighbour, he called me up, and, with more severity than usual, ordered me to hold up my hand. The lash stung me dreadfully, but I was able to smile in his face notwithstanding. I could not have done that had I been guilty. He dropped his hand, already lifted for the second blow, and sent me back to my

seat. I suppose either his heart interfered, or he saw that I was not in need of more punishment. The greatest good he did me, one for which I shall be ever grateful, was the rousing in me of a love for English literature, especially poetry. But I cannot linger upon this at present, tempting although it be. I have led a busy life in the world since, but it has been one of my greatest comforts when the work of the day was over—dry work if it had not been that I had it to do—to return to my books, and live in the company of those who were greater than myself, and had had a higher work in life than mine. The master used to say that a man was fit company for any man whom he could understand, and therefore I hope often that some day, in some future condition of existence, I may look upon the faces of Milton and Bacon and Shakspere, whose writings have given me so much strength and hope throughout my life here.

The moment he saw me, the master came up to me and took me by the hand, saying he was glad to see me able to come to school again.

"You must not try to do too much at first," he added.

This set me on my mettle, and I worked hard and with some success. But before the morning was over I grew very tired, and fell fast asleep with my head on the desk. I was informed afterwards that the master had interfered when one of my class-fellows was trying to wake me, and told him to let me sleep.

When one o'clock came, I was roused by the noise of dismissal for the two hours for dinner. I staggered out, still stupid with sleep, and whom should I find watching for me by the door-post but Turkey!

"Turkey!" I exclaimed; "you here!"

"Yes, Ranald," he said; "I've put the cows up for an hour or two, for it was very hot; and Kirsty said I might come and carry you home."

So saying he stooped before me, and took me on his strong back. As soon as I was well settled, he turned his head, and said:

"Ranald, I should like to go and have a look at my mother. Will you come? There's plenty of time."

"Yes, please, Turkey," I answered. "I've never seen your mother."

He set off at a slow easy trot, and bore me through street and lane until we arrived at a two-storey house, in the roof of which his mother lived. She was a widow, and had only Turkey. What a curious place her little garret was! The roof sloped down on one side to the very floor, and there was a little window in it, from which I could see away to the manse, a mile off, and far beyond it. Her bed stood in one corner, with a check curtain hung from a rafter in front of it. In another was a chest, which contained all their spare clothes, including Turkey's best garments, which he went home to put on every Sunday morning. In the little grate smouldered a fire of oak-bark, from which all the astringent virtue had been extracted in the pits

at the tanyard, and which was given to the poor for nothing.

Turkey's mother was sitting near the little window, spinning. She was a spare, thin, sad-looking woman, with loving eyes and slow speech.

"Johnnie!" she exclaimed, "what brings you here? and who 's this you 've brought with you?"

Instead of stopping her work as she spoke, she made her wheel go faster than before; and I gazed with admiration at her deft fingering of the wool, from which the thread flowed in a continuous line, as if it had been something plastic, towards the revolving spool.

"It 's Ranald Bannerman," said Turkey quietly. "I 'm his horse. I 'm taking him home from the school. This is the first time he 's been there since he was ill."

Hearing this, she relaxed her labour, and the hooks which had been revolving so fast that they were invisible in a mist of motion, began to dawn into form, until at length they revealed their shape, and at last stood quite still. She rose, and said:

"Come, Master Ranald, and sit down. You 'll be tired of riding such a rough horse as that."

"No, indeed," I said; "Turkey is not a rough horse; he 's the best horse in the world."

"He always calls me Turkey, mother, because of my nose," said Turkey, laughing.

"And what brings you here?" asked his mother. "This is not on the road to the manse."

"I wanted to see if you were better, mother."

"But what becomes of the cows?"

"Oh! they're all safe enough. They know I'm here."

"Well, sit down and rest you both," she said, resuming her own place at the wheel. "I'm glad to see you, Johnnie, so be your work is not neglected. I must go on with mine."

Thereupon Turkey, who had stood waiting his mother's will, deposited me upon her bed, and sat down beside me.

"And how's your papa, the good man?" she said to me.

I told her he was quite well.

"All the better that you're restored from the grave, I don't doubt," she said.

I had never known before that I had been in any danger.

"It's been a sore time for him and you too," she added. "You must be a good son to him, Ranald, for he was in a great way about you, they tell me."

Turkey said nothing, and I was too much surprised to know what to say; for as often as my father had come into my room, he had always looked cheerful, and I had had no idea that he was uneasy about me.

After a little more talk, Turkey rose, and said we must be going.

"Well, Ranald," said his mother, "you must come and see me any time when you're tired at the school,

and you can lie down and rest yourself a bit. Be a good lad, Johnnie, and mind your work."

"Yes, mother, I'll try," answered Turkey cheerfully, as he hoisted me once more upon his back. "Good day, mother," he added, and left the room.

I mention this little incident because it led to other things afterwards. I rode home upon Turkey's back; and with my father's leave, instead of returning to school that day, spent the afternoon in the fields with Turkey.

In the middle of the field where the cattle were that day, there was a large circular mound. I have often thought since that it must have been a barrow, with dead men's bones in the heart of it, but no such suspicion had then crossed my mind. Its sides were rather steep, and covered with lovely grass. On the side farthest from the manse, and without one human dwelling in sight, Turkey and I lay that afternoon, in a bliss enhanced to me, I am afraid, by the contrasted thought of the close, hot, dusty schoolroom, where my classfellows were talking, laughing, and wrangling, or perhaps trying to work in spite of the difficulties of after-dinner disinclination. A fitful little breeze, as if itself subject to the influence of the heat, would wake up for a few moments, wave a few heads of horse-daisies, waft a few strains of odour from the blossoms of the white clover, and then die away fatigued with the effort. Turkey took out his Jew's-harp, and discoursed soothing if not eloquent strains.

At our feet, a few yards from the mound, ran a babbling brook, which divided our farm from the next. Those of my readers whose ears are open to the music of Nature, must have observed how different are the songs sung by different brooks. Some are a mere tinkling, others are sweet as silver bells, with a tone besides which no bell ever had. Some sing in a careless, defiant tone. This one sung in a veiled voice, a contralto muffled in the hollows of overhanging banks, with a low, deep, musical gurgle in some of the stony eddies, in which a straw would float for days and nights till a flood came, borne round and round in a funnel-hearted whirlpool. The brook was deep for its size, and had a good deal to say in a solemn tone for such a small stream. We lay on the side of the hillock, I say, and Turkey's Jew's-harp mingled its sounds with those of the brook. After a while he laid it aside, and we were both silent for a time.

At length Turkey spoke.

"You 've seen my mother, Ranald."

"Yes, Turkey."

"She 's all I 've got to look after."

"I haven't got any mother to look after, Turkey."

"No. You 've a father to look after you. I must do it, you know. My father wasn't over good to my mother. He used to get drunk sometimes, and then he was very rough with her. I must make it up to her as well as I can. She 's not well off, Ranald."

"Isn't she, Turkey?"

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HERDING GRANDMOTHER'S COW.

"No. She works very hard at her spinning, and no one spins better than my mother. How could they? But it 's very poor pay, you know, and she 'll be getting old by and by."

"Not to-morrow, Turkey."

"No, not to-morrow, nor the day after," said Turkey, looking up with some surprise to see what I meant by the remark.

He then discovered that my eyes had led my thoughts astray, and that what he had been saying about his mother had got no farther than into my ears. For on the opposite side of the stream, on the grass, like a shepherdess in an old picture, sat a young girl, about my own age, in the midst of a crowded colony of daisies and white clover, knitting so that her needles went as fast as Kirsty's, and were nearly as invisible as the thing with the hooked teeth in it that looked so dangerous and ran itself out of sight upon Turkey's mother's spinning-wheel. A little way from her was a fine cow feeding, with a long iron chain dragging after her. The girl was too far off for me to see her face very distinctly; but something in her shape, her posture, and the hang of her head, I do not know what, had attracted me.

"Oh! there 's Elsie Duff," said Turkey, himself forgetting his mother in the sight—"with her granny's cow! I didn't know she was coming here to-day."

"How is it," I asked, "that she is feeding her on old James Joss's land?"

"Oh! they're very good to Elsie, you see. Nobody cares much about her grandmother; but Elsie's not her grandmother, and although the cow belongs to the old woman, yet for Elsie's sake, this one here and that one there gives her a bite for it—that's a day's feed generally. If you look at the cow, you'll see she's not like one that feeds by the roadsides. She's as plump as needful, and has a good udderful of milk besides."

"I'll run down and tell her she may bring the cow into this field to-morrow," I said, rising.

"I would if it were *mine*," said Turkey, in a marked tone, which I understood.

"Oh! I see, Turkey," I said. "You mean I ought to ask my father."

"Yes, to be sure, I do mean that," answered Turkey.

"Then it's as good as done," I returned. "I will ask him to-night."

"She's a good girl, Elsie," was all Turkey's reply.

How it happened I cannot now remember, but I know that, after all, I did not ask my father, and Granny Gregson's cow had no bite either off the glebe or the farm. And Turkey's reflections concerning the mother he had to take care of having been interrupted, the end to which they were moving remained for the present unuttered.

I soon grew quite strong again, and had neither plea nor desire for exemption from school labours. My father also had begun to take me in hand as well as

my brother Tom ; and what with arithmetic and Latin together, not to mention geography and history, I had quite enough to do, and quite as much also as was good for me.

CHAPTER XV.

A NEW COMPANION.

DURING this summer, I made the acquaintance at school of a boy called Peter Mason. Peter was a clever boy, from whose merry eye a sparkle was always ready to break. He seldom knew his lesson well, but, when *kept in* for not knowing it, had always learned it before any of the rest had got more than half through. Amongst those of his own standing he was the acknowledged leader in the play-

ground, and was besides often invited to take a share in the amusements of the older boys, by whom he was petted because of his cleverness and obliging disposition. Beyond school hours, he spent his time in all manner of pranks. In the hot summer weather he would bathe twenty times a day, and was as much at home in the water as any dabchick. And that was how I came to be more with him than was good for me.

There was a small river not far from my father's house, which at a certain point was dammed back by a weir of large stones to turn part of it aside into a mill-race. The mill stood a little way down, under a steep bank. It was almost surrounded with trees, willows by the water's edge, and birches and larches up the bank. Above the dam was a fine spot for bathing, for you could get any depth you liked—from two feet to five or six; and here it was that most of the boys of the village bathed, and I with them. I cannot recall the memory of those summer days without a gush of delight gurgling over my heart, just as the water used to gurgle over the stones of the dam. It was a quiet place, particularly on the side to which my father's farm went down, where it was sheltered by the same little wood which further on surrounded the mill. The field which bordered the river was kept in natural grass, thick and short and fine, for here on the bank it grew well, although such grass was not at all common in that part of the country: upon other parts

of the same farm, the grass was sown every year along with the corn. Oh the summer days, with the hot sun drawing the odours from the feathery larches and the white-stemmed birches, when, getting out of the water, I would lie in the warm soft grass, where now and then the tenderest little breeze would creep over my skin, until the sun baking me more than was pleasant, I would rouse myself with an effort, and running down to the fringe of rushes that bordered the full-brimmed river, plunge again headlong into the quiet brown water, and dabble and swim till I was once more weary! For innocent animal delight, I know of nothing to match those days—so warm, yet so pure-aired—so clean, so glad. I often think how God must love his little children to have invented for them such delights! For, of course, if he did not love the children and delight in their pleasure, he would not have invented the two and brought them together. Yes, my child, I know what you would say,—"How many there are who have no such pleasures!" I grant it sorrowfully; but you must remember that God has not done with them yet; and, besides, that there are more pleasures in the world than you or I know anything about. And if we had it *all* pleasure, I know I should not care so much about what is better, and I would rather be made good than have any other pleasure in the world; and so would you, though perhaps you do not know it yet.

One day, a good many of us were at the water to-

gether. I was somebody amongst them in my own estimation because I bathed off my father's ground, while they were all on a piece of bank on the other side which was regarded as common to the village. Suddenly upon the latter spot, when they were all undressed, and some already in the water, appeared a man who had lately rented the property of which that was part, accompanied by a dog, with a flesh-coloured nose and a villanous look—a mongrel in which the bull predominated. He ordered every one off his premises. Invaded with terror, all, except a big boy who trusted that the dog would be more frightened at his naked figure than he was at the dog, plunged into the river, and swam or waded from the inhospitable shore. Once in the embrace of the stream some of them thoughtlessly turned and mocked the enemy, forgetting how much they were still in his power. Indignant at the tyrant, I stood up in the "limpid wave," and assured the aquatic company of a welcome to the opposite bank. So far all was very well. But their clothes! They, alas! were upon the bank they had left!

The spirit of a host was upon me, for now I regarded them all as my guests.

"You come ashore when you like," I said; "I will see what can be done about your clothes."

I knew that just below the dam lay a little boat built by the miller's sons. It was clumsy enough, but in my eyes a marvel of engineering art. On the op-

posite side stood the big boy braving the low-bred cur which barked and growled at him with its ugly head stretched out like a serpent's; while his owner, who was probably not so unkind as we thought him, stood enjoying the fun of it all. Reckoning upon the big boy's assistance, I scrambled out of the water, and sped, like Achilles of the swift foot, for the boat. I jumped in and seized the oars, intending to row across, and get the big boy to throw the clothes of the party into the boat. But I had never handled an oar in my life, and in the middle passage—how it happened I cannot tell—I found myself floundering in the water.

Now, although you might expect that the water being dammed back just here, it would be shallow below the dam, it was just the opposite. Had the bottom been hard, it would have been shallow; but as the bottom was soft and muddy, the rush of the water over the dam in the winter-floods had here made a great hollow. There was besides another weir a very little way below which again dammed the water back; so that the depth was greater here than in almost any other part within the ken of the village boys. Indeed there were horrors afloat concerning its depth. I was but a poor swimmer, for swimming is a natural gift and is not equally distributed to all. I might have done better, however, but for those stories of the awful gulf beneath me. I was struggling and floundering, half-blind, and quite deaf, with a sense of the water constantly getting up and stopping me, whatever I

wanted to do, when I felt myself laid hold of by the leg, dragged under water, and a moment after landed safe on the bank. Almost the same moment I heard a plunge, and getting up, staggering and bewildered, saw, as through the haze of a dream, a boy swimming after the boat, which had gone down with the slow current. I saw him overtake it, scramble into it in mid stream, and handle the oars as to the manner born. When he had brought it back to the spot where I stood, I knew that Peter Mason was my deliverer. Quite recovered by this time from my slight attack of drowning, I got again into the boat, and leaving the oars to Peter, was rowed across and landed. There was no further difficulty. The man, alarmed, I suppose, at the danger I had run, recalled his dog; we bundled in the clothes; Peter rowed them across; Rory, the big boy, took the water after the boat, and I plunged in again above the dam. For the whole of that summer and part of the following winter, Peter was my hero, to the forgetting even of my friend Turkey. I took every opportunity of joining him in his games, partly from gratitude, partly from admiration, but more than either from the simple human attraction of the boy. It was some time before he led me into any real mischief, but it came at last.

CHAPTER XVI.

I GO DOWN HILL.

IT came in the following winter.

My father had now begun to teach me as well as Tom, but I confess I did not then value the privilege. I had got much too fond of the society of Peter Mason, and all the time I could command I spent with him. Always full of questionable frolic, the spirit of mischief gathered in him as the dark nights drew on. The sun, and the wind, and the green fields, and the flowing waters of summer kept him within bounds; but when the ice and the snow came, when the sky was gray with one cloud, when the wind was full of needle-points of frost and the ground was hard as a stone, when the evenings were dark, and the sun at noon shone low down and far away in the south, then the demon of mischief awoke in the bosom of Peter Mason, and, this winter, I am ashamed to say, drew me also into the net.

Nothing very bad was the result before the incident I am about to relate. There must have been, however, a gradual declension towards it, although the pain

which followed upon this has almost obliterated the recollection of preceding follies. Nobody does anything bad all at once. Wickedness needs an apprenticeship as well as more difficult trades.

It was in January, not long after the shortest day, the sun setting about half-past three o'clock. At three school was over, and just as we were coming out, Peter whispered to me, with one of his merriest twinkles in his eyes:

"Come across after dark, Ranald, and we'll have some fun."

I promised, and we arranged when and where to meet. It was Friday, and I had no Latin to prepare for Saturday, therefore my father did not want me. I remember feeling very jolly as I went home to dinner, and made the sun set ten times at least, by running up and down the earthen wall which parted the fields from the road; for as often as I ran up I saw him again over the shoulder of the hill, behind which he was going down. When I had had my dinner, I was so impatient to join Peter Mason that I could not rest, and from very idleness began to tease wee Davie. A great deal of that nasty teasing, so common among boys, comes of idleness. Poor Davie began to cry at last, and I, getting more and more wicked, went on teasing him, until at length he burst into a howl of wrath and misery, whereupon the Kelpie, who and some tenderness for him, burst into the room, and boxed my ears soundly. I was in a fury of rage and

revenge, and had I been near anything I could have caught up, something serious would have been the result. In spite of my resistance, she pushed me out of the room and locked the door. I would have complained to my father, but I was perfectly aware that, although *she* had no right to strike me, I had deserved chastisement for my behaviour to my brother. I was still boiling with anger when I set off for the village to join Mason. I mention all this to show that I was in a bad state of mind, and thus prepared for the wickedness which followed. I repeat, a boy never disgraces himself all at once. He does not tumble from the top to the bottom of the cellar stair. He goes down the steps himself till he comes to the broken one, and then he goes to the bottom with a rush. It will also serve to show that the enmity between Mrs. Mitchell and me had in nowise abated, and that however excusable she might be in the case just mentioned, she remained an evil element in the household.

When I reached the village, I found very few people about. The night was very cold, for there was a black frost. There had been a thaw the day before which had carried away the most of the snow, but in the corners lay remnants of dirty heaps which had been swept up there. I was waiting near one of these, which happened to be at the spot where Peter had arranged to meet me, when from a little shop near a girl came out and walked quickly down the street. I

yielded to the temptation arising in a mind which had grown a darkness with slimy things crawling in it. I kicked a hole in the frozen crust of the heap, scraped out a handful of dirty snow, kneaded it into a snowball, and sent it after the girl. It struck her on the back of the head. She gave a cry and ran away, with her hand to her forehead. Brute that I was, I actually laughed. I think I must have been nearer the devil then than I have been since. At least I hope so. For you see it was not with me as with worse-trained boys. I knew quite well that I was doing wrong, and refused to think about it. I felt bad inside. Peter might have done the same thing without being half as wicked as I was. He did not feel the wickedness of that kind of thing as I did. He would have laughed over it merrily. But the vile dregs of my wrath with the Kelpie were fermenting in my bosom, and the horrid pleasure I found in annoying an innocent girl because the wicked Kelpie had made me angry, could never have been expressed in a merry laugh like Mason's. The fact is, I was more displeased with myself than with anybody else, though I did not allow it, and would not take the trouble to repent and do the right thing. If I had even said to wee Davie that I was sorry, I do not think I should have done the other wicked things that followed; for this was not all by any means.

In a little while Peter joined me. He laughed, of course, when I told him how the girl had run like a frighted hare, but that was poor fun in his eyes.

"Look here, Ranald," he said, holding out some thing like a piece of wood.

"What is it, Peter?" I asked.

"It's the stalk of a cabbage," he answered. "I've scooped out the inside and filled it with tow. We'll set fire to one end, and blow the smoke through the keyhole."

"Whose keyhole, Peter?"

"An old witch's that I know of. She'll be in such a rage! It'll be fun to hear her cursing and swearing. We'd serve the same to every house in the row, but that would be more than we could get off with. Come along. Here's a rope to tie her door with first."

I followed him, not without inward misgivings, which I kept down as well as I could. I argued with myself, "*I* am not doing it; I am only going with Peter: what business is that of anybody's so long as I don't touch the thing myself?" Only a few minutes more, and I was helping Peter to tie the rope to the latch-handle of a poor little cottage, saying now to myself, "This doesn't matter. This won't do her any harm. This isn't smoke. And after all, smoke won't hurt the nasty old thing. It'll only make her angry. It may do her cough good: I dare say she's got a cough." I knew all I was saying was false, and yet I acted on it. Was not that as wicked as wickedness could be? One moment more, and Peter was blowing through the hollow cabbage-stalk in at the keyhole with all his might. Catching a breath of the stifling smoke him-

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A TRICK PLAYED ON GRANNY GREGSON.

self, however, he began to cough violently, and passed the wicked instrument to me. I put my mouth to it, and blew with all my might. I believe now that there was some far more objectionable stuff mingled with the tow. In a few moments we heard the old woman begin to cough. Peter, who was peeping in at the window, whispered—

"She 's rising. Now we 'll catch it, Ranald!"

Coughing as she came, I heard her with shuffling steps approach the door, thinking to open it for air. When she failed in opening it, and found besides where the smoke was coming from, she broke into a torrent of fierce and vengeful reproaches, mingled with epithets by no means flattering. She did not curse and swear as Peter had led me to expect, although her language was certainly far enough from refined; but therein I, being, in a great measure, the guilty cause, was more to blame than she. I laughed because I would not be unworthy of my companion, who was genuinely amused; but I was, in reality, shocked at the tempest I had raised. I stopped blowing, aghast at what I had done; but Peter caught the tube from my hand and recommenced the assault with fresh vigour, whispering through the keyhole, every now and then between the blasts, provoking, irritating, even insulting remarks on the old woman's personal appearance and supposed ways of living. This threw her into paroxysms of rage and of coughing, both increasing in violence; and the war of words grew, she tugging at

the door as she screamed, he answering merrily, and with pretended sympathy for her sufferings, until I lost all remaining delicacy in the humour of the wicked game, and laughed loud and heartily.

Of a sudden the scolding and coughing ceased. A strange sound and again silence followed. Then came a shrill, suppressed scream; and we heard the voice of a girl, crying:

"Grannie! grannie! What 's the matter with you? Can't you speak to me, grannie? They 've smothered my grannie!"

Sobs and moans were all we heard now. Peter had taken fright at last, and was busy undoing the rope. Suddenly he flung the door wide and fled, leaving me exposed to the full gaze of the girl. To my horror it was Elsie Duff! She was just approaching the door, her eyes streaming with tears, and her sweet face white with agony. I stood unable to move or speak. She turned away without a word, and began again to busy herself with the old woman, who lay on the ground not two yards from the door. I heard a heavy step approaching. Guilt awoke fear and restored my powers of motion. I fled at full speed, not to find Mason, but to leave everything behind me.

When I reached the manse, it stood alone in the starry blue night. Somehow I could not help thinking of the time when I came home after waking up in the barn. That, too, was a time of misery, but, oh! how different from this! Then I had only been cruelly

treated myself; now I had actually committed cruelty. Then I sought my father's bosom as the one refuge; now I dreaded the very sight of my father, for I could not look him in the face. He was my father, but I was not his son. A hurried glance at my late life revealed that I had been behaving very badly, growing worse and worse. I became more and more miserable as I stood, but what to do I could not tell. The cold at length drove me into the house. I generally sat with my father in his study of a winter night now, but I dared not go near it. I crept to the nursery, where I found a bright fire burning, and Allister reading by the blaze, while Davie lay in bed at the other side of the room. I sat down and warmed myself, but the warmth could not reach the lump of ice at my heart. I sat and stared at the fire. Allister was too much occupied with his book to take any heed of me. All at once I felt a pair of little arms about my neck, and Davie was trying to climb upon my knees. Instead of being comforted however, I spoke very crossly, and sent him back to his bed whimpering. You see I was only miserable; I was not repentant. I was eating the husks with the swine, and did not relish them; but I had not said, "I will arise and go to my father."

How I got through the rest of that evening I hardly know. I tried to read, but could not. I was rather fond of arithmetic; so I got my slate and tried to work a sum; but in a few moments I was sick of it. At family prayers I never lifted my head to look at my

father, and when they were over, and I had said good night to him, I felt that I was sneaking out of the room. But I had some small sense of protection and safety when once in bed beside little Davie, who was sound asleep, and looked as innocent as little Samuel when the voice of God was going to call him. I put my arm round him, hugged him close to me, and began to cry, and the crying brought me sleep.

It was a very long time now since I had dreamt my old childish dream; but this night it returned. The old sunny-faced sun looked down upon me very solemnly. There was no smile on his big mouth, no twinkle about the corners of his little eyes. He looked at Mrs. Moon as much as to say, "What *is* to be done? The boy has been going the wrong way: must we disown him?" The moon neither shook her head nor moved her lips, but turned as on a pivot, and stood with her back to her husband, looking very miserable. Not one of the star-children moved from its place They shone sickly and small. In a little while they faded out; then the moon paled and paled until she too vanished without ever turning her face to her husband; and last the sun himself began to change, only instead of paling he drew in all his beams, and shrunk smaller and smaller, until no bigger than a candle-flame. Then I found that I was staring at a candle on the table; and that Tom was kneeling by the side of the other bed, saying his prayers.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TROUBLE GROWS.

WHEN I woke in the morning, I tried to persuade myself that I had made a great deal too much of the whole business; that if not a dignified thing to do, it was at worst but a boy's trick; only I would have no more to say to Peter Mason, who had betrayed me at the last moment without even the temptation of any benefit to himself. I went to school as usual. It was the day for the Shorter Catechism. None failed but Peter and me; and we two were kept in alone, and left in the schoolroom together. I seated myself as far from him as I could. In half an hour he had learned his task, while I had not mastered the half of mine. Thereupon he proceeded, regardless of my entreaties, to prevent me learning it. I begged, and prayed, and appealed to his pity, but he would pull the book away from me, gabble bits of ballads in my ear as I was struggling with *Effectual Calling*, tip up the form on which I was seated, and, in short, annoy me in twenty different ways. At last I began to cry, for Mason was a bigger and stronger boy than I, and I

could not help myself against him. Lifting my head after the first vexation was over, I thought I saw a shadow pass from the window. Although I could not positively say I saw it, I had a conviction it was Turkey, and my heart began to turn again towards him. Emboldened by the fancied proximity, I attempted my lesson once more, but that moment Peter was down upon me like a spider. At last, however, growing suddenly weary of the sport, he desisted, and said:

"Ran, you can stay if you like. I've learned my catechism, and I don't see why I should wait *his* time."

As he spoke he drew a picklock from his pocket—his father was an ironmonger—deliberately opened the schoolroom door, slipped out, and locked it behind him. Then he came to one of the windows, and began making faces at me. But vengeance was nigher than he knew. A deeper shadow darkened my page, and when I looked up, there was Turkey towering over Mason, with his hand on his collar, and his whip lifted. The whip did not look formidable. Mason received the threat as a joke, and laughed in Turkey's face. Perceiving, however, that Turkey looked dangerous, with a sudden wriggle, at which he was an adept, he broke free, and, trusting to his tried speed of foot, turned his head and made a grimace as he took to his heels. Before, however, he could widen the space between them sufficiently, Turkey's whip came down

upon him. With a howl of pain Peter doubled himself up, and Turkey fell upon him, and, heedless of his yells and cries, pommelled him severely. Although they were now at some distance, too great for the distinguishing of words, I could hear that Turkey mingled admonition with punishment. A little longer, and Peter crept past the window, a miserable mass of collapsed and unstrung impudence, his face bleared with crying, and his knuckles dug into his eyes. And this was the boy I had chosen for my leader! He had been false to me, I said to myself; and the noble Turkey, seeing his behaviour through the window, had watched to give him his deserts. My heart was full of gratitude.

Once more Turkey drew near the window. What was my dismay and indignation to hear him utter the following words:

"If you weren't your father's son, Ranald, and my own old friend, I would serve you just the same."

Wrath and pride arose in me at the idea of Turkey, who used to call himself my horse, behaving to me after this fashion; and, my evil ways having half made a sneak of me, I cried out:

"I'll tell my father, Turkey."

"I only wish you would, and then I should be no tell-tale if he asked me why, and I told him all about it. You young blackguard! You're no gentleman! To sneak about the streets and hit girls with snowballs! I scorn you!"

"You must have been watching, then, Turkey, and you had no business to do that," I said, plunging at any defence.

"I was not watching you. But if I had been, it would have been just as right as watching Hawkie. You ill-behaved creature! You're a true minister's son."

"It's a mean thing to do, Turkey," I persisted, seeking to stir up my own anger and blow up my self-approval.

"I tell you I did not do it. I met Elsie Duff crying in the street because you had hit her with a dirty snowball. And then to go and smoke her and her poor grannie, till the old woman fell down in a faint or a fit, I don't know which! You deserve a good pommelling yourself, I can tell you, Ranald. I'm ashamed of you."

He turned to go away.

"Turkey, Turkey," I cried, "isn't the old woman better?"

"I don't know. I'm going to see," he answered.

"Come back and tell me, Turkey," I shouted, as he disappeared from the field of my vision.

"Indeed I won't. I don't choose to keep company with such as you. But if ever I hear of you touching them again, you shall have more of me than you'll like, and you may tell your father so when you please."

I had indeed sunk low when Turkey, who had been such a friend, would have nothing to say to me more.

In a few minutes the master returned, and finding me crying, was touched with compassion. He sent me home at once, which was well for me, as I could not have repeated a single question. He thought Peter had crept through one of the panes that opened for ventilation, and did not interrogate me about his disappearance.

The whole of the rest of that day was miserable enough. I even hazarded one attempt at making friends with Mrs. Mitchell, but she repelled me so rudely that I did not try again. I could not bear the company of either Allister or Davie. I would have gone and told Kirsty, but I said to myself that Turkey must have already prejudiced her against me. I went to bed the moment prayers were over, and slept a troubled sleep. I dreamed that Turkey had gone and told my father, and that he had turned me out of the house.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LIGHT OUT OF DARKNESS.

I WOKE early on the Sunday morning, and a most dreary morning it was. I could not lie in bed, and, although no one was up yet, rose and dressed myself. The house was as waste as a sepulchre. I opened the front door and went out. The world itself was no better. The day had hardly begun to dawn. The dark dead frost held it in chains of iron. The sky was dull and leaden, and cindery flakes of snow were thinly falling. Everywhere life looked utterly dreary and hopeless. What was there worth living for? I went out on the road, and the ice in the ruts crackled under my feet like the bones of dead things. I wandered away from the house, and the keen wind cut me to the bone, for I had not put on plaid or cloak. I turned into a field, and stumbled along over its uneven surface, swollen into hard frozen lumps, so that it was like walking upon stones. The summer was gone and the winter was here, and my heart was colder and more miserable than any winter in the world. I found myself at length at the hillock

where Turkey and I had lain on that lovely afternoon the year before. The stream below was dumb with frost. The wind blew wearily but sharply across the bare field. There was no Elsie Duff, with head drooping over her knitting, seated in the summer grass on the other side of a singing brook. Her head was aching on her pillow because I had struck her with that vile lump; and instead of the odour of white clover she was breathing the dregs of the hateful smoke with which I had filled the cottage. I sat down, cold as it was, on the frozen hillock, and buried my face in my hands. Then my dream returned upon me. This was how I sat in my dream when my father had turned me out of doors. Oh how dreadful it would be! I should just have to lie down and die.

I could not sit long for the cold. Mechanically I rose and paced about. But I grew so wretched in body that it made me forget for a while the trouble of my mind, and I wandered home again. The house was just stirring. I crept to the nursery, undressed, and lay down beside little Davie, who cried out in his sleep when my cold feet touched him. But I did not sleep again, although I lay till all the rest had gone to the parlour. I found them seated round a blazing fire waiting for my father. He came in soon after, and we had our breakfast, and Davie gave his crumbs as usual to the robins and sparrows which came hopping on the window-sill. I fancied my father's eyes were often turned in my direction, but I could not lift

mine to make sure. I had never before known what misery was.

Only Tom and I went to church that day: it was so cold. My father preached from the text, "Be sure your sin shall find you out." I thought with myself that he had found out my sin, and was preparing to punish me for it, and I was filled with terror as well as dismay. I could scarcely keep my seat, so wretched was I. But when after many instances in which punishment had come upon evil-doers when they least expected it, and in spite of every precaution to fortify themselves against it, he proceeded to say that a man's sin might find him out long before the punishment of it overtook him, and drew a picture of the misery of the wicked man who fled when none pursued him, and trembled at the rustling of a leaf, then I was certain that he knew what I had done, or had seen through my face into my conscience. When at last we went home, I kept waiting the whole of the day for the storm to break, expecting every moment to be called to his study. I did not enjoy a mouthful of my food, for I felt his eyes upon me, and they tortured me. I was like a shy creature of the woods whose hole has been stopped up: I had no place of refuge—nowhere to hide my head; and I felt so naked! My very soul was naked. After tea I slunk away to the nursery, and sat staring into the fire. Mrs. Mitchell came in several times and scolded me for sitting there, instead of with Tom and the rest in the parlour, but I

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SUNDAY NIGHT IN THE MANSE.

was too miserable even to answer her. At length she brought Davie, and put him to bed; and a few minutes after, I heard my father coming down the stair with Allister, who was chatting away to him. I wondered how he could. My father came in with the big Bible under his arm, as was his custom on Sunday nights, drew a chair to the table, rang for candles, and with Allister by his side and me seated opposite to him, began to find a place from which to read to us. To my yet stronger conviction, he began and read through without a word of remark the parable of the Prodigal Son. When he came to the father's delight at having him back, the robe, and the shoes, and the ring, I could not repress my tears. "If I could only go back," I thought, "and set it all right! but then I've never gone away." It was a foolish thought, instantly followed by a longing impulse to tell my father all about it. How could it be that I had not thought of this before? I had been waiting all this time for my sin to find me out; why should I not frustrate my sin, and find my father first?

As soon as he had done reading, and before he had opened his mouth to make any remark, I crept round the table to his side, and whispered in his ear,—

"Papa, I want to speak to you."

"Very well, Ranald," he said, more solemnly, I thought, than usual; "come up to the study."

He rose and led the way, and I followed. A whimper of disappointment came from Davie's bed. My father

went and kissed him, and said he would soon be back, whereupon Davie nestled down satisfied.

When we reached the study, he closed the door, sat down by the fire, and drew me towards him.

I burst out crying, and could not speak for sobs. He encouraged me most kindly. He said,

"Have you been doing anything wrong, my boy?"

"Yes, papa, very wrong," I sobbed. "I 'm disgusted with myself."

"I am glad to hear it, my dear," he returned. "There is some hope of you, then."

"Oh! I don't know that," I rejoined. "Even Turkey despises me."

"That 's very serious," said my father. "He 's a fine fellow, Turkey. I should not like him to despise me. But tell me all about it."

It was with great difficulty I could begin, but with the help of questioning me, my father at length understood the whole matter. He paused for a while plunged in thought; then rose, saying,—

"It 's a serious affair, my dear boy; but now you have told me, I shall be able to help you."

"But you knew about it before, didn't you, papa? Surely you did!"

"Not a word of it, Ranald. You fancied so because your sin had found you out. I must go and see how the poor woman is. I don't want to reproach you at all, now you are sorry, but I should like you just to think that you have been helping to make that poor

old woman wicked. She is naturally of a sour disposition, and you have made it sourer still, and no doubt made her hate everybody more than she was already inclined to do. You have been working against God in this parish."

I burst into fresh tears. It was too dreadful.

"What *am* I to do?" I cried.

"Of course you must beg Mrs. Gregson's pardon, and tell her that you are both sorry and ashamed."

"Yes, yes, papa. Do let me go with you."

"It's too late to find her up, I'm afraid; but we can just go and see. We've done a wrong, a very grievous wrong, my boy, and I cannot rest till I at least know the consequences of it."

He put on his long great-coat and muffler in haste, and having seen that I too was properly wrapped up, he opened the door, and stepped out. But remembering the promise he had made to Davie, he turned and went down to the nursery to speak to him again, while I awaited him on the doorsteps. It would have been quite dark but for the stars, and there was no snow to give back any of their shine. The earth swallowed all their rays, and was no brighter for it. But oh, what a change to me from the frightful morning! When my father returned, I put my hand in his almost as fearlessly as Allister or wee Davie might have done, and away we walked together.

"Papa," I said, "why did you say *we* have done a wrong? You did not do it."

"My dear boy, persons who are so near each other as we are, must not only bear the consequences together of any wrong done by one of them, but must, in a sense, bear each other's iniquities even. If I sin, you must suffer; if you sin, you being my own boy, I must suffer. But this is not all: it lies upon both of us to do what we can to get rid of the wrong done; and thus we have to bear each other's sin. I am accountable to make amends as far as I can; and also to do what I can to get you to be sorry and make amends as far as you can."

"But, papa, isn't that hard?" I asked.

"Do you think I should like to leave you to get out of your sin as you best could, or sink deeper and deeper into it? Should I grudge anything to take the weight of the sin, or the wrong to others, off you? Do you think I should want not to be troubled about it? Or if I were to do anything wrong, would you think it very hard that you had to help me to be good, and set things right? Even if people looked down upon you because of me, would you say it was hard? Would you not rather say, 'I 'm glad to bear anything for my father: I 'll share with him'?"

"Yes, indeed, papa. I would rather share with you than not, whatever it was."

"Then you see, my boy, how kind God is in tying us up in one bundle that way. It is a grand and beautiful thing that the fathers should suffer for the children, and the children for the fathers. Come along.

We must step out, or I fear we shall not be able to make our apology to-night. When we 've got over this, Ranald, we must be a good deal more careful what company we keep."

"Oh, papa," I answered, "if Turkey would only forgive me!"

"There 's no fear. Turkey is sure to forgive you when you 've done what you can to make amends. He 's a fine fellow, Turkey. I have a high opinion of Turkey—as you call him."

"If he would, papa, I should not wish for any other company than his."

"A boy wants various kinds of companions, Ranald; but I fear you have been neglecting Turkey. You owe him much."

"Yes, indeed I do, papa," I answered; "and I have been neglecting him. If I had kept with Turkey, I should never have got into such a dreadful scrape as this."

"That is too light a word to use for it, my boy. Don't call a wickedness a scrape; for a wickedness it certainly was, though I am only too willing to believe you had no adequate idea at the time *how* wicked it was."

"I won't again, papa. But I am so relieved already."

"Perhaps poor old Mrs. Gregson is not relieved, though. You ought not to forget her."

Thus talking, we hurried on until we arrived at the cottage. A dim light was visible through the window. My father knocked, and Elsie Duff opened the door

CHAPTER XIX.

FORGIVENESS.

WHEN we entered, there sat the old woman on the further side of the hearth, rocking herself to and fro. I hardly dared look up. Elsie's face was composed and sweet. She gave me a shy tremulous smile, which went to my heart and humbled me dreadfully. My father took the stool on which Elsie had been sitting. When he had lowered himself upon it, his face was nearly on a level with that of the old woman, who took no notice of him, but kept rocking herself to and fro and moaning.

He laid his hand on hers, which, old and withered and not very clean, lay on her knee.

"How do you find yourself to-night, Mrs. Gregson?" he asked.

"I 'm an ill-used woman," she replied with a groan, behaving as if it was my father who had maltreated her, and whose duty it was to make an apology for it.

"I am aware of what you mean, Mrs. Gregson. That is what brought me to inquire after you. I hope you are not seriously the worse for it."

"I 'm an ill-used woman," she repeated. "Every man's hand 's against me."

"Well, I hardly think that," said my father in a cheerful tone. "*My* hand 's not against you now."

"If you bring up your sons, Mr. Bannerman, to mock at the poor, and find their amusement in driving the aged and infirm to death's door, you can't say your hand 's not against a poor lone woman like me."

"But I don't bring up my sons to do so. If I did I shouldn't be here now. I am willing to bear my part of the blame, Mrs. Gregson, but to say I bring my sons up to that kind of wickedness, is to lay on me more than my share, a good deal.—Come here, Ranald."

I obeyed with bowed head and shame-stricken heart, for I saw what wrong I had done my father, and that although few would be so unjust to him as this old woman, many would yet blame the best man in the

world for the wrongs of his children. When I stood by my father's side, the old woman just lifted her head once to cast on me a scowling look, and then went on again rocking herself.

"Now, my boy," said my father, "tell Mrs. Gregson why you have come here to-night."

I had to use a dreadful effort to make myself speak. It was like resisting a dumb spirit and forcing the words from my lips. But I did not hesitate a moment. In fact, I dared not hesitate, for I felt that hesitation would be defeat.

"I came, papa—" I began.

"No no, my man," said my father; "you must speak to Mrs. Gregson, not to me."

Thereupon I had to make a fresh effort. When at this day I see a child who will not say the words required of him, I feel again just as I felt then, and think how difficult it is for him to do what he is told; but oh, how I wish he would do it, that he might be a conqueror! for I know that if he will not make the effort, it will grow more and more difficult for him to make any effort. I cannot be too thankful that I was able to overcome now.

"I came, Mrs. Gregson," I faltered, "to tell you that I am very sorry I behaved so ill to you."

"Yes, indeed," she returned. "How would you like any one to come and serve you so in your grand house? But a poor lone widow-woman like me is nothing to be thought of. Oh no! not at all."

"I am ashamed of myself," I said, almost forcing my confession upon her.

"So you ought to be all the days of your life. You deserve to be drummed out of the town for a minister's son that you are! Hoo!"

"I 'll never do it again, Mrs. Gregson."

"You 'd better not, or you shall hear of it, if there 's a sheriff in the county. To insult honest people after that fashion!"

I drew back, more than ever conscious of the wrong I had done in rousing such unforgiving fierceness in the heart of a woman. My father spoke now.

"Shall I tell you, Mrs. Gregson, what made the boy sorry, and made him willing to come and tell you all about it?"

"Oh, I 've got friends after all. The young pro digal!"

"You are coming pretty near it, Mrs. Gregson," said my father; "but you haven't touched it quite. It was a friend of yours that spoke to my boy and made him very unhappy about what he had done, telling him over and over again what a shame it was, and how wicked of him. Do you know what friend it was?"

"Perhaps I do, and perhaps I don't. I can guess."

"I fear you don't guess quite correctly. It was the best friend you ever had or ever will have. It was God himself talking in my poor boy's heart. He would not heed what he said all day, but in the evening we

were reading how the prodigal son went back to his father, and how the father forgave him ; and he couldn't stand it any longer, and came and told me all about it."

"It wasn't you he had to go to. It wasn't you he smoked to death—was it now? It was easy enough to go to you."

"Not so easy perhaps. But he has come to you now."

"Come when you made him!"

"I didn't make him. He came gladly. He saw it was all he could do to make up for the wrong he had done."

"A poor amends!" I heard her grumble ; but my father took no notice.

"And you know, Mrs. Gregson," he went on, "when the prodigal son did go back to his father, his father forgave him at once."

"Easy enough! He was his father, and fathers always side with their sons."

I saw my father thinking for a moment.

"Yes ; that is true," he said. "And what he does himself, he always wants his sons and daughters to do. So he tells us that if we don't forgive one another, he will not forgive us. And as we all want to be forgiven, we had better mind what we 're told. If you don't forgive this boy, who has done you a great wrong, but is sorry for it, God will not forgive you—and that 's a serious affair."

"He 's never begged my pardon yet," said the old woman, whose dignity required the utter humiliation of the offender.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Gregson," I said. "I shall never be rude to you again."

"Very well," she answered, a little mollified at last. "Keep your promise, and we 'll say no more about it. It 's for your father's sake, mind, that I forgive you."

I saw a smile trembling about my father's lips, but he suppressed it, saying,

"Won't you shake hands with him, Mrs. Gregson?"

She held out a poor shrivelled hand, which I took very gladly; but it felt so strange in mine that I was frightened at it: it was like something half dead. But at the same moment, from behind me another hand, a rough little hand, but warm and firm and all alive, slipped into my left hand. I knew it was Elsie Duff's, and the thought of how I had behaved to her rushed in upon me with a cold misery of shame. I would have knelt at her feet, but I could not speak my sorrow before witnesses. Therefore I kept hold of her hand and led her by it to the other end of the cottage, for there was a friendly gloom, the only light in the place coming from the glow—not flame—of a fire of peat and bark. She came readily, whispering before I had time to open my mouth—

"I 'm sorry grannie 's so hard to make it up."

"I deserve it," I said. "Elsie, I 'm a brute. I could knock my head on the wall. Please forgive me."

"It's not me," she answered. "You didn't hurt me. I didn't mind it."

"Oh, Elsie! I struck you with that horrid snowball."

"It was only on the back of my neck. It didn't hurt me much. It only frightened me."

"I didn't know it was you. If I had known, I am sure I shouldn't have done it. But it was wicked and contemptible anyhow, to any girl."

I broke down again, half from shame, half from the happiness of having cast my sin from me by confessing it. Elsie held my hand now.

"Never mind; never mind," she said; "you won't do it again."

"I would rather be hanged," I sobbed.

That moment a pair of strong hands caught hold of mine, and the next I found myself being hoisted on somebody's back, by a succession of heaves and pitches, which did not cease until I was firmly seated. Then a voice said—

"I 'm his horse again, Elsie, and I 'll carry him home this very night."

Elsie gave a pleased little laugh; and Turkey bore me to the fireside, where my father was talking away in a low tone to the old woman. I believe he had now turned the tables upon her, and was trying to convince her of her unkind and grumbling ways. But he did not let us hear a word of the reproof.

"Eh! Turkey, my lad! is that you? I didn't know you were there," he said.

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"WE 'RE FRIENDS NOW," SAID TURKEY.

I had never before heard my father address him as Turkey.

"What are you doing with that great boy upon your back?" he continued.

"I 'm going to carry him home, sir."

"Nonsense! He can walk well enough."

Half ashamed, I began to struggle to get down, but Turkey held me tight.

"But you see, sir," said Turkey, "we 're friends now. *He's* done what he could, and *I* want to do what I can."

"Very well," returned my father, rising; "come along; it 's time we were going."

When he bade her good night, the old woman actually rose and held out her hand to both of us.

"Good night, Grannie," said Turkey. "Good night, Elsie." And away we went.

Never conqueror on his triumphal entry was happier than I, as through the starry night I rode home on Turkey's back. The very stars seemed rejoicing over my head. When I think of it now, the words always come with it, "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth," and I cannot but believe they rejoiced then, for if ever I repented in my life I repented then. When at length I was down in bed beside Davie, it seemed as if there could be nobody in the world so blessed as I was: I had been forgiven. When I woke in the morning, I was as it were new born into a new world. Before

getting up I had a rare game with Davie, whose shrieks of laughter at length brought Mrs. Mitchell with angry face; but I found myself kindly disposed even towards her. The weather was much the same; but its dreariness had vanished. There was a glowing spot in my heart which drove out the cold, and glorified the black frost that bound the earth. When I went out before breakfast, and saw the red face of the sun looking through the mist like a bright copper kettle, he seemed to know all about it, and to be friends with me as he had never been before; and I was quite as well satisfied as if the sun of my dream had given me a friendly nod of forgiveness.

CHAPTER XX.

I HAVE A FALL AND A DREAM.

ELSIE DUFF'S father was a farm-labourer, with a large family. He was what is called a cottar in Scotland, which name implies that of the large farm upon which he worked for yearly wages he had a little bit of land to cultivate for his own use. His wife's mother was Grannie Gregson. She was so old that she needed some one to look after her, but she had a cottage of her own in the village, and would not go and live with her daughter, and, indeed, they were not anxious to have her, for she was not by any means a pleasant person. So there was no help for it: Elsie must go and be her companion. It was a great trial to her at first, for her home was a happy one, her mother being very unlike her grandmother; and, besides, she greatly preferred the open fields to the streets of the village. She did not grumble, however, for where is the good of grumbling where duty is plain, or even when a thing cannot be helped? She found it very lonely though, especially when her grannie was in one of her gloomy moods. Then she would not answer a

question, but leave the poor girl to do what she thought best, and complain of it afterwards. This was partly the reason why her parents, towards the close of the spring, sent a little brother, who was too delicate to be of much use at home, to spend some months with his grannie, and go to school. The intention had been that Elsie herself should go to school, but what with the cow and her grandmother together she had not been able to begin. Of course grannie grumbled at the proposal, but, as Turkey, my informant on these points, explained, she was afraid lest, if she objected, they should take Elsie away and send a younger sister in her place. So little Jamie Duff came to the school.

He was a poor little white-haired, red-eyed boy, who found himself very much out of his element there. Some of the bigger boys imagined it good fun to tease him; but on the whole he was rather a favourite, for he looked so pitiful, and took everything so patiently. For my part, I was delighted at the chance of showing Elsie Duff some kindness through her brother. The girl's sweetness clung to me, and not only rendered it impossible for me to be rude to any girl, but kept me awake to the occurrence of any opportunity of doing something for her sake. Perceiving one day, before the master arrived, that Jamie was shivering with cold, I made way for him where I stood by the fire; and then found that he had next to nothing upon his little body, and that the soles of his shoes were hanging half

off. This in the month of March in the north of Scotland was bad enough, even if he had not had a cough. I told my father when I went home, and he sent me to tell Mrs. Mitchell to look out some old garments of Allister's for him; but she declared there were none. When I told Turkey this he looked very grave, but said nothing. When I told my father, he desired me to take the boy to the tailor and shoemaker, and get warm and strong clothes and shoes made for him. I was proud enough of the commission, and if I did act the grand benefactor a little, I have not yet finished the penance of it, for it never comes into my mind without bringing its shame with it. Of how many people shall I not have to beg the precious forgiveness when I meet them in the other world! For the sake of this penal shame, I confess I let the little fellow walk behind me, as I took him through the streets. Perhaps I may say this for myself, that I never thought of demanding any service of him in return for mine: I was not so bad as that. And I was true in heart to him notwithstanding my pride, for I had a real affection for him. I had not seen his sister—to speak to I mean—since that Sunday night.

One Saturday afternoon, as we were having a game something like hare and hounds, I was running very hard through the village, when I set my foot on a loose stone, and had a violent fall. When I got up, I saw Jamie Duff standing by my side, with a face of utter consternation. I discovered afterwards that he was in

the way of following me about. Finding the blood streaming down my face, and remarking when I came to myself a little that I was very near the house where Turkey's mother lived, I crawled thither, and up the stairs to her garret, Jamie following in silence. I found her busy as usual at her wheel, and Elsie Duff stood talking to her, as if she had just run in for a moment and must not sit down. Elsie gave a little cry when she saw the state I was in, and Turkey's mother got up and made me take her chair while she hastened to get some water. I grew faint, and lost my consciousness. When I came to myself I was leaning against Elsie, whose face was as white as a sheet with dismay. I took a little water and soon began to revive.

When Turkey's mother had tied up my head, I rose to go home, but she persuaded me to lie down a while. I was not unwilling to comply. What a sense of blissful repose pervaded me, weary with running, and perhaps faint with loss of blood, when I stretched myself on the bed, whose patchwork counterpane, let me say for Turkey's mother, was as clean as any down quilt in chambers of the rich. I remember so well how a single ray of sunlight fell on the floor from the little window in the roof, just on the foot that kept turning the spinning-wheel. Its hum sounded sleepy in my ears. I gazed at the sloping ray of light, in which the ceaseless rotation of the swift wheel kept the motes dancing most busily, until at length to my half-closed eyes it became a huge Jacob's ladder, crowded with an innumerable company

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ELSIE SINGS RANALD ASLEEP.

of ascending and descending angels, and I thought it must be the same ladder I used to see in my dream. The drowsy delight which follows on the loss of blood possessed me, and the little garret with the slanting roof, and its sloping sun-ray, and the whirr of the wheel, and the form of the patient woman that span, had begun to gather about them the hues of Paradise to my slowly fading senses, when I heard a voice that sounded miles away, and yet close to my ear:

"Elsie, sing a little song, will you?"

I heard no reply. A pause followed, and then a voice, clear and melodious as a brook, began to sing, and before it ceased, I was indeed in a kind of paradise.

But here I must pause. Shall I be breaking my promise of not a word of Scotch in my story, if I give the song? True it is not a part of the story exactly, but it is in it. If my reader would like the song, he must have it in Scotch or not at all. I am not going to spoil it by turning it out of its own natural clothes into finer garments to which it was not born—I mean by translating it from Scotch into English. The best way will be this: I give the song as something extra—call it a footnote slipped into the middle of the page. Nobody needs read a word of it to understand the story; and being in smaller type and a shape of its own, it can be passed over without the least trouble.

SONG.

Oh! the bonny, bonny dell, whaur the yorlin* sings,
Wi' a clip o' the sunshine atween his wings;
Whaur the birks† are a' straikit wi' fair munelicht,
And the broom hings its lamps by day and by nicht;
Whaur the burnie comes trottin' ower shingle and stane,
Liltin'‡ bonny havers§ til 'tsel alane;
And the sliddery‖ troot, wi' ae soop o' its tail,
Is awa' 'neath the green weed's swingin' veil!
Oh! the bonny, bonny dell, whaur I sang as I saw
The yorlin, the broom, an' the burnie, an' a'!

Oh! the bonny, bonny dell, whaur the primroses wonn
Luikin' oot o' their leaves like wee sons o' the sun;
Whaur the wild roses hing like flickers o' flame,
And fa' at the touch wi' a dainty shame;
Whaur the bee swings ower the white clovery sod,
And the butterfly flits like a stray thoucht o' God;
Whaur, like arrow shot frae life's unseen bow,
The dragon-fly burns the sunlicht throu'!
Oh! the bonny, bonny dell, whaur I sang to see
The rose and the primrose, the draigon and bee!

Oh! the bonny, bonny dell, whaur the mune luiks doon,
As gin she war hearin' a soundless tune,
Whan the flowers an' the birds are a' asleep,
And the verra burnie gangs creepy-creep;
Whaur the corn-craik craiks in the lang lang rye,
And the nicht is the safter for his rouch cry;
Whaur the wind wad fain lie doon on the slope,
And the verra darkness owerflows wi' hope!
Oh! the bonny, bonny dell, whaur, silent, I felt
The mune an' the darkness baith into me melt.

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* The Yellow-hammer. † Birch-trees. ‡ Singing
§ Nonsense. ‖ Slippery.

Oh! the bonny, bonny dell, whaur the sun luiks in,
Sayin', Here awa', there awa', haud awa', sin!
Wi' the licht o' God in his flashin' ee,
Sayin', Darkness and sorrow a' work for me!
Whaur the lark springs up on his ain sang borne,
Wi' bird-shout and jubilee hailin' the morn;
For his hert is fu' o' the hert o' the licht,
An', come darkness or winter, a' maun be richt!
Oh! the bonny, bonny dell, whaur the sun luikit in,
Sayin', Here awa', there awa', haud awa', sin.

Oh! the bonny, bonny dell, whaur I used to lie
Wi' Jeanie aside me, sae sweet and sae shy!
Whaur the wee white gowan wi' reid reid tips,
Was as white as her cheek and as reid as her lips.
Oh, her ee had a licht cam frae far 'yont the sun,
And her tears cam frae deeper than salt seas run!
O' the sunlicht and munelicht she was the queen,
For baith war but middlin' withoot my Jean.
Oh! the bonny, bonny dell, whaur I used to lie
Wi' Jeanie aside me, sae sweet and sae shy!

Oh! the bonny, bonny dell, whaur the kirkyard lies,
A' day and a' nicht, luikin' up to the skies;
Whaur the sheep wauk up i' the summer nicht,
Tak a bite, and lie doon, and await the licht;
Whaur the psalms roll ower the grassy heaps,
And the wind comes and moans, and the rain comes and weeps!
But Jeanie, my Jeanie—she 's no lyin' there,
For she 's up and awa' up the angels' stair.
Oh! the bonny, bonny dell, whaur the kirkyard lies,
And the stars luik doon, and the nicht-wind sighs!

Elsie's voice went through every corner of my brain: there was singing in all its chambers. I could not hear the words of the song well enough to understand

them quite; but Turkey gave me a copy of them afterwards. They were the schoolmaster's work. All the winter, Turkey had been going to the evening school, and the master had been greatly pleased with him, and had done his best to get him on in various ways. A friendship sprung up between them; and one night he showed Turkey these verses. Where the air came from, I do not know: Elsie's brain was full of tunes. I repeated them to my father once, and he was greatly pleased with them.

On this first acquaintance, however, they put me to sleep; and little Jamie Duff was sent over to tell my father what had happened. Jamie gave the message to Mrs. Mitchell, and she, full of her own importance, must needs set out to see how much was the matter.

I was dreaming an unutterably delicious dream. It was a summer evening. The sun was of a tremendous size, and of a splendid rose-colour. He was resting with his lower edge on the horizon, and dared go no further, because all the flowers would sing instead of giving out their proper scents, and if he left them, he feared utter anarchy in his kingdom before he got back in the morning. I woke and saw the ugly face of Mrs. Mitchell bending over me. She was pushing me, and calling to me to wake up. The moment I saw her I shut my eyes tight, turned away, and pretended to be fast asleep again, in the hope that she would go away and leave me with my friends.

"Do let him have his sleep out, Mrs. Mitchell," said Turkey's mother.

"You 've let him sleep too long already," she returned, ungraciously. "He 'll do all he can, waking or sleeping, to make himself troublesome. He 's a ne'er-do-well, Ranald. Little good 'll ever come of him. It 's a mercy his mother is under the mould, for he would have broken her heart."

I had come to myself quite by this time, but I was not in the least more inclined to acknowledge it to Mrs. Mitchell.

"You 're wrong there, Mrs. Mitchell," said Elsie Duff; and my reader must remember it required a good deal of courage to stand up against a woman so much older than herself, and occupying the important position of housekeeper to the minister. "Ranald is a good boy. I 'm sure he is."

"How dare you say so, when he served your poor old grandmother such a wicked trick? It's little the children care for their parents nowadays. Don't speak to me.'

"No, don't, Elsie," said another voice, accompanied by a creaking of the door and a heavy step. "Don't speak to her, Elsie, or you 'll have the worst of it. Leave her to me.—If Ranald did what you say, Mrs. Mitchell, and I don't deny it, he was at least very sorry for it afterwards, and begged grannie's pardon; and that 's a sort of thing *you* never did in your life."

"I never had any occasion, Turkey; so you hold your tongue."

'Now don't you call me *Turkey*. I won't stand it. I was christened as well as you."

"And what are *you* to speak to me like that? Go home to your cows. I dare say they 're standing supperless in their stalls while you 're gadding about. I 'll call you *Turkey* as long as I please."

"Very well, Kelpie—that 's the name you 're known by, though perhaps no one has been polite enough to use it to your face, for you 're a great woman, no doubt —I give you warning that I know you. When you 're found out, don't say I didn't give you a chance beforehand."

"You impudent beggar!" cried Mrs. Mitchell, in a rage. "And you 're all one pack," she added, looking round on the two others. "Get up, Ranald, and come home with me directly. What are you lying shamming there for?"

As she spoke, she approached the bed; but Turkey was too quick for her, and got in front of it. As he was now a great strong lad, she dared not lay hands upon him, so she turned in a rage and stalked out of the room, saying,

"Mr. Bannerman shall hear of this."

"Then it 'll be both sides of it, Mrs. Mitchell," I cried from the bed; but she vanished, vouchsafing me no reply.

Once more Turkey got me on his back and carried me home. I told my father the whole occurrence. He examined the cut and plastered it up for me, saying he

would go and thank Turkey's mother at once. I confess I thought more of Elsie Duff and her wonderful singing, which had put me to sleep, and given me the strange lovely dream from which the rough hands and harsh voice of the Kelpie had waked me too soon.

After this, although I never dared go near her grandmother's house alone, I yet, by loitering and watching, got many a peep of Elsie. Sometimes I went with Turkey to his mother's of an evening, to which my father had no objection, and somehow or other Elsie was sure to be there, and we spent a very happy hour or two together. Sometimes she would sing, and sometimes I would read to them out of Milton—I read the whole of Comus to them by degrees in this way; and although there was much I could not at all understand, I am perfectly certain it had an ennobling effect upon every one of us. It is not necessary that the intellect should define and separate before the heart and soul derive nourishment. As well say that a bee can get nothing out of a flower, because she does not understand botany. The very music of the stately words of such a poem is enough to generate a better mood, to make one feel the air of higher regions, and wish to rise "above the smoke and stir of this dim spot." The best influences which bear upon us are of this vague sort—powerful upon the heart and conscience, although undefined to the intellect.

But I find I have been forgetting that those for whom I write are young—too young to understand

this. Let it remain, however, for those older persons who at an odd moment, while waiting for dinner, or before going to bed, may take up a little one's book, and turn over a few of its leaves. Some such readers, in virtue of their hearts being young and old both at once, discern more in the children's books than the children themselves.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BEES' NEST.

IT was twelve o'clock on a delicious Saturday in the height of summer. We poured out of school with the gladness of a holiday in our hearts. I sauntered home full of the summer sun, and the summer wind, and the summer scents which filled the air. I do not know how often I sat down in perfect bliss upon the earthen walls which

divided the fields from the road, and basked in the heat. These walls were covered with grass and moss. The odour of a certain yellow feathery flower, which grew on them rather plentifully, used to give me special delight. Great humble-bees haunted the walls, and were poking about in them constantly. Butterflies also found them pleasant places, and I delighted in butterflies, though I seldom succeeded in catching one. I do not remember that I ever killed one. Heart and conscience both were against that. I had got the loan of Mrs. Trimmer's story of the family of robins, and was every now and then reading a page of it with unspeakable delight. We had very few books for children in those days and in that far out-of-the-way place, and those we did get were the more dearly prized. It was almost dinner-time before I reached home. Somehow in this grand weather, welcome as dinner always was, it did not possess the same amount of interest as in the cold bitter winter. This day I almost hurried over mine to get out again into the broad sunlight. Oh, how stately the hollyhocks towered on the borders of the shrubbery! The guelder-roses hung like balls of snow in their wilderness of green leaves; and here and there the damask roses, dark almost to blackness, and with a soft velvety surface, enriched the sunny air with their colour and their scent. I never see these roses now. And the little bushes of polyanthus gemmed the dark earth between with their varied hues. We did not know anything about flowers except the delight they

gave us, and I dare say I am putting some together which would not be out at the same time, but that is how the picture comes back to my memory.

I was leaning in utter idleness over the gate that separated the little lawn and its surroundings from the road, when a troop of children passed, with little baskets and tin pails in their hands; and amongst them Jamie Duff. It was not in the least necessary to ask him where he was going.

Not very far, about a mile or so from our house, rose a certain hill famed in the country round for its store of bilberries. It was the same to which Turkey and I had fled for refuge from the bull. It was called the Ba' Hill, and a tradition lingered in the neighbourhood that many years ago there had been a battle there, and that after the battle the conquerors played at football with the heads of the vanquished slain, and hence the name of the hill; but who fought or which conquered, there was not a shadow of a record. It had been a wild country, and conflicting clans had often wrought wild work in it. In summer the hill was of course the haunt of children gathering its bilberries. Jamie shyly suggested whether I would not join them, but they were all too much younger than myself; and besides I felt drawn to seek Turkey in the field with the cattle—that is, when I should get quite tired of doing nothing. So the little troop streamed on, and I remained leaning over the gate.

I suppose I had sunk into a dreamy state, for I was

suddenly startled by a sound beside me, and looking about, saw an old woman, bent nearly double within an old gray cloak, notwithstanding the heat. She leaned on a stick, and carried a bag like a pillow-case in her hand. It was one of the poor people of the village, going her rounds for her weekly dole of a handful of oatmeal. I knew her very well by sight and by name—she was old Eppie—and a kindly greeting passed between us. I thank God that the frightful poor-laws had not invaded Scotland when I was a boy. There was no degradation in honest poverty then, and it was no burden to those who supplied its wants; while every person was known, and kindly feelings were nourished on both sides. If I understand anything of human nature now, it comes partly of having known and respected the poor of my father's parish. She passed in at the gate and went as usual to the kitchen door, while I stood drowsily contemplating the green expanse of growing crops in the valley before me. The day had grown as sleepy as myself. There were no noises except the hum of the unseen insects, and the distant rush of the water over the dams at our bathing-place. In a few minutes the old woman approached me again. She was an honest and worthy soul, and very civil in her manners. Therefore I was surprised to hear her muttering to herself. Turning, I saw she was very angry. She ceased her muttering when she descried me observing her, and walked on in silence—was even about to pass through the little

wicket at the side of the larger gate without any further salutation. Something had vexed her, and instinctively I put my hand in my pocket, and pulled out a halfpenny my father had given me that morning—very few of which came in my way—and offered it to her. She took it with a half-ashamed glance, an attempt at a courtesy, and a murmured blessing. Then for a moment she looked as if about to say something, but changing her mind, she only added another grateful word, and hobbled away. I pondered in a feeble fashion for a moment, came to the conclusion that the Kelpie had been rude to her, forgot her, and fell a-dreaming again. Growing at length tired of doing nothing, I roused myself, and set out to seek Turkey.

I have lingered almost foolishly over this day. But when I recall my childhood, this day always comes back as a type of the best of it.

I remember I visited Kirsty, to find out where Turkey was. Kirsty welcomed me as usual, for she was always loving and kind to us; and although I did not visit her so often now, she knew it was because I was more with my father, and had lessons to learn in which she could not assist me. Having nothing else to talk about, I told her of Eppie, and her altered looks when she came out of the house. Kirsty compressed her lips, nodded her head, looked serious, and made me no reply. Thinking this was strange, I resolved to tell Turkey, which otherwise I might not have done. I did not pursue the matter with Kirsty, for I knew

her well enough to know that her manner indicated a mood out of which nothing could be drawn. Having learned where he was, I set out to find him—close by the scene of our adventure with Wandering Willie. I soon came in sight of the cattle feeding, but did not see Turkey.

When I came near the mound, I caught a glimpse of the head of old Mrs. Gregson's cow quietly feeding off the top of the wall from the other side, like an outcast Gentile; while my father's cows, like the favoured and greedy Jews, were busy in the short clover inside. Grannie's cow managed to live notwithstanding, and I dare say gave as good milk, though not perhaps quite so much of it, as ill-tempered Hawkie. Mrs. Gregson's grand-daughter, however, who did not eat grass, was inside the wall, seated on a stone which Turkey had no doubt dragged there for her. Trust both her and Turkey, the cow should not have a mouthful without leave of my father. Elsie was as usual busy with her knitting. And now I caught sight of Turkey, running from a neighbouring cottage with a spade over his shoulder. Elsie had been minding the cows for him.

"What 's ado, Turkey?" I cried, running to meet him.

"Such a wild-bees' nest!" answered Turkey. "I 'm so glad you 're come! I was just thinking whether I wouldn't run and fetch you. Elsie and I have been watching them going out and in for the last half-hour. —Such lots of bees! There 's a store of honey *there*."

"But isn't it too soon to take it, Turkey? There'll be a great deal more in a few weeks.—Not that I know anything about bees," I added deferentially.

"You're quite right, Ranald," answered Turkey; "but there are several things to be considered. In the first place, the nest is by the roadside, and somebody else might find it. Next, Elsie has never tasted honey all her life, and it *is* so nice, and here she is, all ready to eat some. Thirdly, and lastly, as your father says—though not very often," added Turkey slyly, meaning that the *lastly* seldom came with the *thirdly*,—"if we take the honey now, the bees will have plenty of time to gather enough for the winter before the flowers are gone, whereas if we leave it too long they will starve."

I was satisfied with this reasoning, and made no further objection.

"You must keep a sharp look-out though, Ranald," he said; "for they'll be mad enough, and you must keep them off with your cap."

He took off his own, and gave it to Elsie, saying:

"Here, Elsie: you must look out, and keep off the bees. I can tell you a sting is no joke. I've had three myself."

"But what are *you* to do, Turkey?" asked Elsie, with an anxious face.

"Oh, Ranald will keep them off me and himself too. I shan't heed them. I must dig away, and get at the honey."

All things being thus arranged, Turkey manfully approached the *dyke*, as they call any kind of wall-fence there. In the midst of the grass and moss was one little hole, through which the bees kept going and coming very busily. Turkey put in his finger and felt in what direction the hole went, and thence judging the position of the hoard, struck his spade with firm foot into the dyke. What bees were in came rushing out in fear and rage, and I had quite enough to do to keep them off our bare heads with my cap. Those who were returning, laden as they were, joined in the defence, but I did my best, and with tolerable success. Elsie being at a little distance, and comparatively still, was less the object of their resentment. In a few moments Turkey had reached the store. Then he began to dig about it carefully to keep from spoiling the honey. First he took out a quantity of cells with nothing in them but grub-like things—the cradles of the young bees they were. He threw them away, and went on digging as coolly as if he had been gardening. All the defence he left to me, and I assure you I had enough of it, and thought mine the harder work of the two: hand or eye had no rest, and my mind was on the stretch of anxiety all the time.

But now Turkey stooped to the nest, cleared away the earth about it with his hands, and with much care drew out a great piece of honeycomb, just as well put together as the comb of any educated bees in a garden-hive, who know that they are working for critics. Its

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ROBBING THE BEES' NEST.

surface was even and yellow, showing that the cells were full to the brim of the rich store. I think I see Turkey weighing it in his hand, and turning it over to pick away some bits of adhering mould ere he presented it to Elsie. She sat on her stone like a patient, contented queen, waiting for what her subjects would bring her.

"Oh, Turkey! what a piece!" she said as she took it, and opened her pretty mouth and white teeth to have a bite of the treasure.

"Now, Ranald," said Turkey, "we must finish the job before we have any ourselves."

He went on carefully removing the honey, and piling it on the bank. There was not a great deal, because it was so early in the year, and there was not another comb to equal that he had given Elsie. But when he had got it all out—

"They'll soon find another nest," he said. "I don't think it's any use leaving this open for them. It spoils the dyke too."

As he spoke he began to fill up the hole, and beat the earth down hard. Last of all, he put in the sod first dug away, with the grass and flowers still growing upon it. This done, he proceeded to divide what remained of the honey.

"There's a piece for Allister and Davie," he said; "and here's a piece for you, and this for me, and Elsie can take the rest home for herself and Jamie."

Elsie protested, but we both insisted. Turkey got

some nice clover, and laid the bits of honeycomb in it. Then we sat and ate our shares, and chatted away for a long time, Turkey and I getting up every now and then to look after the cattle, and Elsie too having sometimes to follow her cow, when she threatened an inroad upon some neighbouring field while we were away. But there was plenty of time between, and Elsie sung us two or three songs at our earnest request, and Turkey told us one or two stories out of history books he had been reading, and I pulled out my story of the Robins and read to them. And so the hot sun went down the glowing west, and threw longer and longer shadows eastward. A great shapeless blot of darkness, with legs to it, accompanied every cow, and calf, and bullock wherever it went. There was a new shadow crop in the grass, and a huge patch with long tree-shapes at the end of it, stretched away from the foot of the hillock. The weathercock on the top of the church was glistening such a bright gold, that the wonder was how it could keep from breaking out into a crow that would rouse all the cocks of the neighbourhood, even although they were beginning to get sleepy, and thinking of going to roost. It was time for the cattle, Elsie's cow included, to go home; for, although the latter had not had such plenty to eat from as the rest, she had been at it all day, and had come upon several very nice little patches of clover, that had overflowed the edges of the fields into the levels and the now dry ditches on the sides of the road. But just

as we rose to break up the assembly, we spied a little girl come flying across the field, as if winged with news. As she came nearer we recognized her. She lived near Mrs. Gregson's cottage, and was one of the little troop whom I had seen pass the manse on their way to gather bilberries.

"Elsie! Elsie!" she cried, "John Adam has taken Jamie. Jamie fell, and John got him."

Elsie looked frightened, but Turkey laughed, saying:

"Never mind, Elsie. John is better than he looks. He won't do him the least harm. He must mind his business, you know."

The Ba' Hill was covered with a young plantation of firs, which, hardy as they were, had yet in a measure to be coaxed into growing in that inclement region. It was amongst their small stems that the coveted bilberries grew, in company with cranberries and crowberries, and dwarf junipers. The children of the village thus attracted to the place were no doubt careless of the young trees, and might sometimes even amuse themselves with doing them damage. Hence the keeper, John Adam, whose business it was to look after them, found it his duty to wage war upon the annual hordes of these invaders; and in their eyes Adam was a terrible man. He was very long and very lean, with a flattish yet Roman nose, and rather ill-tempered mouth, while his face was dead-white and much pitted with the small-pox. He wore corduroy breeches, a blue coat, and a nightcap striped horizontally with

black and red. The youngsters pretended to determine, by the direction in which the tassel of it hung, what mood its owner was in; nor is it for me to deny that their inductions may have led them to conclusions quite as correct as those of some other scientific observers. At all events the tassel was a warning, a terror, and a hope. He could not run very fast, fortunately, for the lean legs within those ribbed grey stockings were subject to rheumatism, and could take only long not rapid strides; and if the children had a tolerable start, and had not the misfortune to choose in their terror an impassable direction, they were pretty sure to get off. Jamie Duff, the most harmless and conscientious creature, who would not have injured a young fir upon any temptation, did take a wrong direction, caught his foot in a hole, fell into a furze bush, and, nearly paralysed with terror, was seized by the long fingers of Adam, and ignominiously lifted by a portion of his garments into the vast aërial space between the ground and the white, pock-pitted face of the keeper. Too frightened to scream, too conscious of trespass to make any resistance, he was borne off as a warning to the rest of the very improbable fate which awaited them.

But the character of Adam was not by any means so frightful in the eyes of Turkey; and he soon succeeded in partially composing the trepidation of Elsie, assuring her that as soon as he had put up the cattle, he would walk over to Adam's house and try to get

Jamie off, whereupon Elsie set off home with her cow, disconsolate but hopeful. I think I see her yet—for I recall every picture of that lovely day clear as the light of that red sunset—walking slowly with her head bent half in trouble, half in attention to her knitting, after her solemn cow, which seemed to take twice as long to get over the ground because she had two pairs of legs instead of one to shuffle across it, dragging her long iron chain with the short stake at the end after her with a gentle clatter over the hard dry road. I accompanied Turkey, helped him to fasten up and bed the cows, went in with him and shared his hasty supper of potatoes and oatcake and milk, and then set out refreshed, and nowise apprehensive in his company, to seek the abode of the redoubtable ogre, John Adam.

CHAPTER XXII.

VAIN INTERCESSION.

HE had a small farm of his own at the foot of the hill of which he had the charge. It was a poor little place, with a very low thatched cottage for the dwelling. A sister kept house for him. When we approached it there was no one to be seen. We advanced to the door along a rough pavement of round stones, which parted the house from the dunghill. I peeped in at the little window as we passed. There, to my astonishment, I saw Jamie Duff, as I thought, looking very happy, and in the act of lifting a spoon to his mouth. A moment after, however, I concluded that I must have been mistaken, for, when Turkey lifted the latch and we walked in, there were the awful John and his long sister seated at the table, while poor Jamie was in a corner, with no basin in his hand, and a face that looked dismal and dreary enough. I fancied I caught a glimpse of Turkey laughing in his sleeve, and felt mildly indignant with him—for Elsie's sake more, I confess, than for Jamie's.

"Come in," said Adam, rising; but, seeing who it was, he seated himself again, adding, "Oh, it 's you.

Turkey!"—Everybody called him Turkey. "Come in and take a spoon."

No, thank you," said Turkey; "I have had my supper. I only came to inquire after that young rascal there."

"Ah! you see him! There he is!" said Adam, looking towards me with an awful expression in his dead brown eyes. "Starving. No home and no supper for him! He 'll have to sleep in the hay-loft with the rats and mice, and a stray cat or two."

Jamie put his cuffs, the perennial handkerchief of our poor little brothers, to his eyes. His fate was full of horrors. But again I thought I saw Turkey laughing in his sleeve.

"His sister is very anxious about him, Mr. Adam," he said. "Couldn't you let him off this once?"

"On no account. I am here in trust, and I must do my duty. The duke gives the forest in charge to me. I have got to look after it."

I could not help thinking what a poor thing it was for a forest. All I knew of forests was from story-books, and there they were full of ever such grand trees. Adam went on—

"And if wicked boys will break down the trees——"

"I only pulled the bilberries," interposed Jamie, in a whine which went off in a howl.

"James Duff!" said Adam, with awful authority, "I saw you myself tumble over a young larch tree, not two feet high."

"The worse for me!" sobbed Jamie.

"Tut! tut! Mr. Adam! the larch tree wasn't a baby," said Turkey. "Let Jamie go. He couldn't help it, you see."

"It *was* a baby, and it *is* a baby," said Adam, with a solitary twinkle in the determined dead brown of his eyes. "And I 'll have no intercession here. Transgressors must be prosecuted, as the board says. And prosecuted he shall be. He sha'n't get out of this before school-time to-morrow morning. He shall be late, too, and I hope the master will give it him well. We must make some examples, you see, Turkey. It 's no use your saying anything. I don't say Jamie 's a worse boy than the rest, but he 's just as bad, else how did he come to be there, tumbling over my babies? Answer me that, Master Bannerman."

He turned and fixed his eyes upon me. There was question in his mouth, but neither question nor speculation in his eyes. I could not meet the awful changeless gaze. My eyes sank before his.

"Example, Master Bannerman, is everything. If you serve my trees as this young man has done——"

The idea of Jamie Duff being a young man!

"—I 'll serve you the same as I serve him—and that 's no sweet service, I 'll warrant."

As the keeper ended, he brought down his fist on the table with such a bang, that poor Jamie almost fell off the stool on which he sat in the corner.

"But let him off just this once," pleaded Turkey,

"and I'll be surety for him that he'll never do it again."

"Oh, as to him, I'm not afraid of him," returned the keeper; "but will you be surety for the fifty boys that'll only make game of me if I don't make an example of him? I'm in luck to have caught him. No, no, Turkey; it won't do, my man. I'm sorry for his father and his mother, and his sister Elsie, for they're all very good people; but I must make an example of him."

At mention of his relatives Jamie burst into another suppressed howl.

"Well, you won't be over hard upon him anyhow: will you now?" said Turkey.

"I won't pull his skin *quite* over his ears," said Adam; "and that's all the promise you'll get out of me."

The tall thin grim sister had sat all the time as if she had no right to be aware of anything that was going on, but her nose, which was more hooked than her brother's, and larger, looked as if, in the absence of eyes and ears, it was taking cognizance of everything, and would inform the rest of the senses afterwards.

I had a suspicion that the keeper's ferocity was assumed for the occasion, and that he was not such an ogre as I had considered him. Still, the prospect of poor little Jamie spending the night alone in the loft amongst the cats and rats was sufficiently dreadful

when I thought of my midnight awaking in the barn. There seemed to be no help, however, especially when Turkey rose to say good-night.

I felt disconsolate, and was not well pleased with Turkey's coolness. I thought he had not done his best.

When we got into the road—

"Poor Elsie!" I said; "she'll be miserable about Jamie."

"Oh no," returned Turkey. "I'll go straight over and tell her. No harm will come to Jamie. John Adam's bark is a good deal worse than his bite. Only I should have liked to take him home if I could."

It was now twilight, and through the glimmering dusk we walked back to the manse. Turkey left me at the gate and strode on towards the village; while I turned in, revolving a new scheme which had arisen in my brain, and for the first time a sense of rivalry with Turkey awoke in my bosom. He did everything for Elsie Duff, and I did nothing. For her he had robbed the bees' nest that very day, and I had but partaken of the spoil. Nay, he had been stung in her service; for, with all my care—and I think that on the whole I had done my best—he had received what threatened to be a bad sting on the back of his neck. Now he was going to comfort her about her brother whom he had failed to rescue; but what if I should succeed where he had failed, and carry the poor boy home in triumph!

As we left the keeper's farm, Turkey had pointed out to me, across the yard, where a small rick or two were standing, the loft in which Jamie would have to sleep. It was over the cart-shed, and its approach was a ladder. But for the reported rats, it would have been no hardship to sleep there in weather like this, especially for one who had been brought up as Jamie had been. But I knew that he was a very timid boy, and that I myself would have lain in horror all the night. Therefore I had all the way been turning over in my mind what I could do to release him. But whatever I did must be unaided, for I could not reckon upon Turkey, nor indeed was it in my heart to share with him the honour of the enterprise that opened before me.

CHAPTER XXIII.

KNIGHT-ERRANTRY.

I MUST mention that my father never objected now to my riding his little mare Missy, as we called her. Indeed, I had great liberty with regard to her, and took her out for a trot and a gallop as often as I pleased. Sometimes when there was a press of work she would have to go in a cart or drag a harrow, for she was so handy they could do anything with her; but this did not happen often, and her condition at all seasons of the year testified that she knew little of hard work. My father was very fond of her, and used to tell wonderful stories of her judgment and skill. I believe he was never quite without a hope that somehow or other he should find her again in the next world. At all events I am certain that it was hard for him to believe that so much wise affection should have been created to be again uncreated. I cannot say that I ever heard him give utterance to anything of the sort; but whence else should I have had such a firm conviction, dating from a period farther back than my memory can reach, that whatever might become

of the other horses, Missy was sure to go to heaven? I had a kind of notion that, being the bearer of my father upon all his missions of doctrine and mercy, she belonged to the clergy, and, sharing in their privileges, must have a chance before other animals of her kind. I believe this was a right instinct glad of a foolish reason. I am wiser now, and extend the hope to the rest of the horses, for I cannot believe that the God who does nothing in vain ever creates in order to destroy.

I made haste to learn my lessons for the Monday, although it was but after a fashion, my mind was so full of the adventure before me. As soon as prayers and supper were over—that is, about ten o'clock—I crept out of the house and away to the stable. It was a lovely night. A kind of grey peace filled earth and air and sky. It was not dark, although rather cloudy; only a dim dusk, like a vapour of darkness, floated around everything. I was fond of being out at night, but I had never before contemplated going so far alone. I should not, however, feel alone with Missy under me, for she and I were on the best of terms, although sometimes she would take a fit of obstinacy, and refuse to go in any other than the direction she pleased. Of late, however, she had asserted herself less frequently in this manner. I suppose she was aware that I grew stronger and more determined.

I soon managed to open the door of the stable, for I knew where the key lay. It was very dark, but I

felt my way through, talking all the time that the horses might not be startled if I came upon one of them unexpectedly, for the stable was narrow, and they sometimes lay a good bit out of their stalls. I took care, however, to speak in a low tone that the man who slept with only a wooden partition between him and the stable might not hear. I soon had the bridle upon Missy, but would not lose time in putting on the saddle. I led her out, got on her back with the help of a stone at the stable door, and rode away. She had scarcely been out all day, and was rather in the mood for a ride. The voice of Andrew, whom the noise of her feet had aroused, came after me, calling to know who it was. I called out in reply, for I feared he might rouse the place; and he went back composed, if not contented. It was no use, at all events, to follow me.

I had not gone far before the extreme stillness of the night began to sink into my soul and make me quiet. Everything seemed thinking about me, but nothing would tell me what it thought. Not feeling, however, that I was doing wrong, I was only awed not frightened by the stillness. I made Missy slacken her speed, and rode on more gently, in better harmony with the night. Not a sound broke the silence except the rough cry of the land-rail from the fields and the clatter of Missy's feet. I did not like the noise she made, and got upon the grass, for here there was no fence. But the moment she felt the soft grass, off she went at a sudden gallop. Her head was out before I

had the least warning of her intention. She tore away over the field in quite another direction from that in which I had been taking her, and the gallop quickened until she was going at her utmost speed. The rapidity of the motion and the darkness together—for it seemed darkness now—I confess made me frightened. I pulled hard at the reins, but without avail. In a minute I had lost my reckoning, and could not tell where I was in the field, which was a pretty large one; but soon finding that we were galloping down a hill so steep that I had trouble in retaining my seat, I began, not at all to my comfort, to surmise in what direction the mare was carrying me. We were approaching the place where we had sat that same afternoon, close by the mound with the trees upon it, the scene of my adventure with Wandering Willie, and of the fancied murder. I had scarcely thought of either until the shadows had begun to fall long, and now in the night, when all was shadow, both reflections made it horrible. Besides, if Missy should get into the bog! But she knew better than that, wild as her mood was. She avoided it, and galloped past, but bore me to a far more frightful goal, suddenly dropping into a canter, and then standing stock-still.

It was a cottage half in ruins, occupied by an old woman whom I dimly recollected having once gone with my father to see—a good many years ago, as it appeared to me now. She was still alive, however, very old, and bedridden. I recollected that from the

top of her wooden bed hung a rope for her to pull herself up by when she wanted to turn, for she was very rheumatic, and this rope for some cause or other had filled me with horror. But there was more of the same sort. The cottage had once been a smithy, and the bellows had been left in its place. Now there is nothing particularly frightful about a pair of bellows, however large it may be, and yet the recollection of that huge structure of leather and wood, with the great iron nose projecting from the contracting cheeks of it, at the head of the old woman's bed, so capable yet so useless, did return upon me with terror in the dusk of that lonely night. It was mingled with a vague suspicion that the old woman was a bit of a witch, and a very doubtful memory that she had been seen on one occasion by some night-farer, when a frightful storm was raging, blowing away at that very bellows as hard as her skinny arms and lean body could work the lever, so that there was almost as great a storm of wind in her little room as there was outside of it. If there was any truth in the story, it is easily accounted for by the fact that the poor old woman had been a little out of her mind for many years,—and no wonder, for she was nearly a hundred, they said. Neither is it any wonder that when Missy stopped almost suddenly, with her fore-feet and her neck stretched forward, and her nose pointed straight for the door of the cottage at a few yards' distance, I should have felt very queer indeed. Whether my hair stood on end or not I do not know,

but I certainly did feel my skin creep all over me. An ancient elder-tree grew at one end of the cottage, and I heard the lonely sigh of a little breeze wander through its branches. The next instant a frightful sound from within the cottage broke the night air into what seemed a universal shriek. Missy gave a plunge, turned round on her hind legs, and tore from the place. I very nearly lost my seat, but terror made me cling the faster to my only companion, as *ventre-à-terre* she flew home. It did not take her a minute to reach the stable-door. There she had to stop, for I had shut it when I brought her out. It was mortifying to find myself there instead of under John Adam's hayloft, the rescuer of Jamie Duff. But I did not think of that for a while. Shaken with terror, and afraid to dismount and be next the ground, I called upon Andrew as well as my fear would permit; but my voice was nearly unmanageable, and I could do little more than howl with it.

In a few minutes, to me a time of awful duration—for who could tell what might be following me up from the hollow?—Andrew appeared half-dressed, and not in the best of tempers, remarking it was an odd thing to go out riding when honest people were in their beds, except, he added, I meant to take to the highway. Thereupon, rendered more communicative by the trial I had gone through, I told him the whole story, what I had intended and how I had been frustrated. He listened, scratched his head, and saying some one

ought to see if anything was the matter with the old woman, turned in to put on the rest of his clothes.

"You had better go home to bed, Ranald," he said.

"Won't you be frightened, Andrew?" I asked.

"Frightened? What should I be frightened at? It's all waste to be frightened before you know whether the thing is worth it."

My courage had been reviving fast in the warm presence of a human being. I was still seated on Missy. To go home having done nothing for Jamie, and therefore nothing for Elsie, after all my grand ideas of rescue and restoration, was too mortifying. I should feel so small when I woke in the morning! And yet suppose the something which gave that fearful cry in the cottage should be out roaming the fields and looking for me! I had courage enough, however, to remain where I was till Andrew came out again, and as I sat still on the mare's back, my courage gradually rose. Nothing increases terror so much as running away. When he reappeared, I asked him:

"What do you think it could be, Andrew?"

"How should I tell?" returned Andrew. "The old woman has a very queer cock, I know, that always roosts on the top of her bed, and crows like no cock I ever heard crow. Or it might be Wandering Willie —he goes to see her sometimes, and the demented creature might strike up his pipes at any unearthly hour."

I was not satisfied with either suggestion; but the

sound I had heard had already grown so indistinct in my memory, that for anything I could tell it might have been either. The terror which it woke in my mind had rendered me incapable of making any observations or setting down any facts with regard to it. I could only remember that I had heard a frightful noise, but as to what it was like I could scarcely bear the smallest testimony.

I begged Andrew to put the saddle on for me, as I should then have more command of Missy. He went and got it, appearing, I thought, not at all over-anxious about old Betty; and I meantime buckled on an old rusty spur which lay in the stable window, the leathers of it crumbling off in flakes. Thus armed, and mounted with my feet in the stirrups, and therefore a good pull on Missy's mouth, I found my courage once more equal to the task before me. Andrew and I parted at right angles; he across the field to old Betty's cottage, and I along the road once more in the direction of John Adam's farm.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FAILURE.

IT must have been now about eleven o'clock. The clouds had cleared off, and the night had changed from brown and gray to blue sparkling with gold. I could see much better, and fancied I could hear better too. But neither advantage did much for me. I had not ridden far from the stable, before I again found myself very much alone and unprotected, with only the wide, silent fields about me, and the wider and more silent sky over my head. The fear began to return. I fancied something strange creeping along every ditch—something shapeless, but with a terrible cry in it. Next I thought I saw a scarcely visible form—now like a creature on all-fours, now like a man, far off, but coming rapidly towards me across the nearest field. It always vanished, however, before it came close. The worst of it was, that the faster I rode, the more frightened I became; for my speed seemed to draw the terrors the faster after me. Having discovered this, I changed my plan, and when I felt more frightened, drew rein and went slower. This was to throw a sort of defiance to the fear; and certainly as

often as I did so it abated. Fear is a worse thing than danger.

I had to pass very nigh the pool to which Turkey and I had gone the night of our adventure with Bogbonny's bull. That story was now far off in the past, but I did not relish the dull shine of the water in the hollow, notwithstanding. In fact I owed the greater part of the courage I possessed—and it was little enough for my needs—to Missy. I dared not have gone on my own two legs. It was not that I could so easily run away with four instead, but that somehow I was lifted above the ordinary level of fear by being upon her back. I think many men draw their courage out of their horses.

At length I came in sight of the keeper's farm; and just at that moment the moon peeped from behind a hill, throwing as long shadows as the setting sun, but in the other direction. The shadows were very different too. Somehow they were liker to the light that made them than the sun shadows are to the sunlight. Both the light and the shadows of the moon were strange and fearful to me. The sunlight and its shadows are all so strong and so real and so friendly, you seem to know all about them; they belong to your house, and they sweep all fear and dismay out of honest people's hearts. But with the moon and its shadows it is very different indeed. The fact is, the moon is trying to do what she cannot do. She is trying to dispel a great sun-shadow—for the night is just

the gathering into one mass of all the shadows of the sun. She is not able for this, for her light is not her own; it is second-hand from the sun himself; and her shadows therefore also are second-hand shadows, pieces cut out of the great sun-shadow, and coloured a little with the moon's yellowness. If I were writing for grown people I should tell them that those who understand things because they think about them, and ask God to teach them, walk in the sunlight; and others, who take things because other people tell them so, are always walking in the strange moonlight, and are subject to no end of stumbles and terrors, for they hardly know light from darkness. Well, at first, the moon frightened me a little—she looked so knowing, and yet all she said round about me was so strange. But I rode quietly up to the back of the yard where the ricks stood, got off Missy and fastened the bridle to the gate, and walked across to the cart-shed, where the moon was shining upon the ladder leading up to the loft. I climbed the ladder, and after several failures succeeded in finding how the door was fastened. When I opened it, the moonlight got in before me, and poured all at once upon a heap of straw in the furthest corner, where Jamie was lying asleep with a rug over him. I crossed the floor, knelt down by him, and tried to wake him. This was not so easy. He was far too sound asleep to be troubled by the rats; for sleep is an armour—yes, a castle—against many enemies. I got hold of one of his hands, and in lifting it

to pull him up found a cord tied to his wrist. I was indignant: they had actually manacled him like a thief! I gave the cord a great tug of anger, pulled out my knife, and cut it; then, hauling Jamie up, got him half-awake at last. He stared with fright first, and then began to cry. As soon as he was awake enough to know me, he stopped crying but not staring, and his eyes seemed to have nothing better than moonlight in them.

"Come along, Jamie," I said. "I 'm come to take you home."

"I don't want to go home," said Jamie. "I want to go to sleep again."

"That 's very ungrateful of you, Jamie," I said, full of my own importance, "when I 've come so far, and all at night too, to set you free."

"I 'm free enough," said Jamie. "I had a better supper a great deal than I should have had at home. I don't want to go before the morning."

And he began to whimper again.

"Do you call this free?" I said, holding up his wrist where the remnant of the cord was hanging.

"Oh!" said Jamie, "that 's only——"

But ere he got farther the moonlight in the loft was darkened. I looked hurriedly towards the door. There stood the strangest figure, with the moon behind it. I thought at first it was the Kelpie come after me, for it was a tall woman. My heart gave a great jump up, but I swallowed it down. I would not disgrace myself

before Jamie. It was not the Kelpie, however, but the keeper's sister, the great, grim, gaunt woman I had seen at the table at supper. I will not attempt to describe her appearance. It was peculiar enough, for she had just got out of bed and thrown an old shawl about her. She was not pleasant to look at. I had myself raised the apparition, for, as Jamie explained to me afterwards, the cord which was tied to his wrist, instead of being meant to keep him a prisoner, was a device of her kindness to keep him from being too frightened. The other end had been tied to her wrist, that if anything happened he might pull her, and then she would come to him.

"What's the matter, Jamie Duff?" she said in a gruff voice as she advanced along the stream of moonlight.

I stood up as bravely as I could.

"It's only me, Miss Adam," I said.

"And who are you?" she returned.

"Ranald Bannerman," I answered.

"Oh!" she said in a puzzled tone. "What are you doing here at this time of the night?"

"I came to take Jamie home, but he won't go."

"You're a silly boy to think my brother John would do him any harm," she returned. "You're comfortable enough, aren't you, Jamie Duff?"

"Yes, thank you, ma'am, quite comfortable," said Jamie, who was now wide-awake. "But, please ma'am, Ranald didn't mean any harm."

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"He's a housebreaker, though," she rejoined with a grim chuckle; "and he'd better go home again as fast as he can. If John Adam should come out, I don't exactly know what might happen. Or perhaps he'd like to stop and keep you company."

"No, thank you, Miss Adam," I said. "I will go home."

"Come along, then, and let me shut the door after you."

Somewhat nettled with Jamie Duff's indifference to my well-meant exertions on his behalf, I followed her without even bidding him good-night.

"Oh, you've got Missy, have you?" she said, spying her where she stood. "Would you like a drink of milk or a piece of oatcake before you go?"

"No, thank you," I said. "I shall be glad to go to bed."

"I should think so," she answered. "Jamie is quite comfortable, I assure you; and I'll take care he's in time for school in the morning. There's no harm in *him*, poor thing!"

She undid the bridle for me, helped me to mount in the kindest way, bade me good-night, and stood looking after me till I was some distance off. I went home at a good gallop, took off the saddle and bridle and laid them in a cart in the shed, turned Missy loose into the stable, shut the door, and ran across the field to the manse, desiring nothing but bed.

When I came near the house from the back, I saw

a figure entering the gate from the front. It was in the full light of the moon, which was now up a good way. Before it had reached the door I had got behind the next corner, and peeping round saw that my first impression was correct: it was the Kelpie. She entered, and closed the door behind her very softly. Afraid of being locked out, a danger which had scarcely occurred to me before, I hastened after her; but finding the door already fast, I called through the keyhole. She gave a cry of alarm, but presently opened the door, looking pale and frightened.

"What are you doing out of doors this time of the night?" she asked, but without quite her usual arrogance, for, although she tried to put it on, her voice trembled too much.

I retorted the question.

"What were you doing out yourself?" I said.

"Looking after you, of course."

"That's why you locked the door, I suppose—to keep me out."

She had no answer ready, but looked as if she would have struck me.

"I shall let your father know of your goings on," she said, recovering herself a little.

"You need not take the trouble. I shall tell him myself at breakfast to-morrow morning. I have nothing to hide. You had better tell him too."

I said this not that I did not believe she had been out to look for me, but because I thought she had

locked the door to annoy me, and I wanted to take my revenge in rudeness. For doors were seldom locked in the summer nights in that part of the country. She made me no reply, but turned and left me, not even shutting the door. I closed it, and went to bed weary enough.

CHAPTER XXV.

TURKEY PLOTS.

THE next day, at breakfast, I told my father all the previous day's adventures. Never since he had so kindly rescued me from the misery of wickedness had I concealed anything from him. He, on his part, while he gave us every freedom, expected us to speak frankly concerning our doings. To have been unwilling to let him know any of our proceedings would have simply argued that they were already disapproved of by ourselves, and no second instance of this had yet occurred with me. Hence it came that still as I grew older I seemed to come nearer to my father. He was to us like a

wiser and more beautiful self over us,—a more enlightened conscience, as it were, ever lifting us up towards its own higher level.

This was Sunday; but he was not so strict in his ideas concerning the day as most of his parishioners. So long as we were sedate and orderly, and neither talked nor laughed too loud, he seldom interfered with our behaviour, or sought to alter the current of our conversation. I believe he did not, like some people, require or expect us to care about religious things as much as he did: we could not yet know as he did what they really were. But when any of the doings of the week were referred to on the Sunday, he was more strict, I think, than on other days, in bringing them, if they involved the smallest question, to the standard of right, to be judged, and approved or condemned thereby. I believe he thought that to order our ways was our best preparation for receiving higher instruction afterwards. For one thing, we should then, upon failure, feel the burden of it the more, and be the more ready to repent and seek the forgiveness of God, and that best help of his which at length makes a man good within himself.

He listened attentively to my story, seemed puzzled at the cry I had heard from the cottage, said nothing could have gone very wrong, or we should have heard of it, especially as Andrew had been to inquire, laughed over the apparition of Miss Adam, and my failure in rescuing Jamie Duff. He said, however, that I had no

right to interfere with constituted authority—that Adam was put there to protect the trees, and if he had got hold of a harmless person, yet Jamie was certainly trespassing, and I ought to have been satisfied with Turkey's way of looking at the matter.

I saw that my father was right, and a little further reflection convinced me that, although my conduct had a root in my regard for Jamie Duff, it had a deeper root in my regard for his sister, and one yet deeper in my regard for myself—for had I not longed to show off in her eyes? I suspect almost all silly actions have their root in selfishness, whether it take the form of vanity, of conceit, of greed, or of ambition.

While I was telling my tale, Mrs. Mitchell kept coming into the room oftener, and lingering longer, than usual. I did not think of this till afterwards. I said nothing about her, for I saw no occasion; but I do not doubt she was afraid I would, and wished to be at hand to defend herself. She was a little more friendly to me in church that day: she always sat beside little Davie.

When we came out, I saw Andrew, and hurried after him to hear how he had sped the night before. He told me he had found all perfectly quiet at the cottage, except the old woman's cough, which was troublesome, and gave proof that she was alive, and probably as well as usual. He suggested now that the noise was all a fancy of mine—at which I was duly indignant, and desired to know if it was also Missy's fancy that made

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TURKEY TELLS RANALD A SECRET.

her go off like a mad creature. He then returned to his former idea of the cock, and as this did not insult my dignity, I let it pass, leaning however myself to the notion of Wandering Willie's pipes.

On the following Wednesday we had a half holiday, and before dinner I went to find Turkey at the farm. He met me in the yard, and took me into the barn.

"I want to speak to you, Ranald," he said.

I remember so well how the barn looked that day. The upper half of one of the doors had a hole in it, and a long pencil of sunlight streamed in, and fell like a pool of glory upon a heap of yellow straw. So golden grew the straw beneath it, that the spot looked as if it were the source of the shine, and sent the slanting ray up and out of the hole in the door. We sat down beside it, I wondering why Turkey looked so serious and important, for it was not his wont.

"Ranald," said Turkey, "I can't bear that the master should have bad people about him."

"What do you mean, Turkey?" I rejoined.

"I mean the Kelpie."

"She's a nasty thing, I know," I answered. "But my father considers her a faithful servant."

"That's just where it is. She is not faithful. I've suspected her for a long time. She's so rough and ill-tempered that she looks honest; but I shall be able to show her up yet. You wouldn't call it honest to cheat the poor, would you?"

"I should think not. But what do you mean?"

"There must have been something to put old Eppie in such an ill-temper on Saturday, don't you think?"

"I suppose she had had a sting from the Kelpie's tongue."

"No, Ranald, that's not it. I had heard whispers going about; and last Saturday, after we came home from John Adam's, and after I had told Elsie about Jamie, I ran up the street to old Eppie. You would have got nothing out of her, for she would not have liked to tell you; but she told me all about it."

"What a creature you are, Turkey! Everybody tells you everything."

"No, Ranald; I don't think I am such a gossip as that. But when you have a chance, you ought to set right whatever you can. Right's the only thing, Ranald."

"But aren't you afraid they'll call you a meddler, Turkey? Not that *I* think so, for I'm sure if you do anything *against* anybody, it's *for* some other body."

"That would be no justification if I wasn't in the right," said Turkey. "But if I am, I'm willing to bear any blame that comes of it. And I wouldn't meddle for anybody that could take care of himself. But neither old Eppie nor your father can do that: the one's too poor, and the other too good."

"I *was* wondering what you meant by saying my father couldn't take care of himself."

"He's too good; he's too good, Ranald. He believes in everybody. *I* wouldn't have kept that Kelpie in *my* house half the time."

"Did you ever say anything to Kirsty about her?"

"I did once; but she told me to mind my own business. Kirsty snubs me because I laugh at her stories. But Kirsty is as good as gold, and I wouldn't mind if she boxed my ears—as indeed she's done—many's the time."

"But what's the Kelpie been doing to old Eppie?"

"First of all, Eppie has been playing her a trick."

"Then she mustn't complain."

"Eppie's was a lawful trick, though. The old women have been laying their old heads together—but to begin at the beginning: there has been for some time a growing conviction amongst the poor folk that the Kelpie never gives them an honest handful of meal when they go their rounds. But this was very hard to prove, and, although they all suspected it, few of them were absolutely certain about it. So they resolved that some of them should go with empty bags. Every one of those found a full handful at the bottom. Still they were not satisfied. They said she was the one to take care what she was about. Thereupon old Eppie resolved to go with something at the bottom of her bag to look like a good quantity of meal already gathered. The moment the door was closed behind her—that was last Saturday—she peeped into the bag. Not one grain of meal was to be discovered. That was why she passed you muttering to herself and looking so angry. Now it will never do that the manse, of all places, should be the one where the poor people

are cheated of their dues. But we must have yet better proof than this before we can say anything."

"Well, what do you mean to do, Turkey?" I asked. "Why does she do it, do you suppose? It's not for the sake of saving my father's meal, I should think."

"No, she does something with it, and, I suppose, flatters herself she is not stealing—only saving it off the poor, and so making a right to it for herself. I can't help thinking that her being out that same night had something to do with it. Did you ever know her go to see old Betty?"

"No. She doesn't like her. I know that."

"I 'm not so sure. She pretends perhaps. But we 'll have a try. I think I can outwit her. She 's fair game, you know."

"How? What? Do tell me, Turkey," I cried, right eagerly.

"Not to-day. I will tell you by and by."

He got up and went about his work.

CHAPTER XXVI.

OLD JOHN JAMIESON.

AS I returned to the house, I met my father.

"Well, Ranald, what are you about?" he said, in his usual gentle tone.

"Nothing in particular, father," I answered.

"Well, I 'm going to see an old man—John Jamieson—I don't think you know him: he has not been able to come to church for a long time. They tell me he is dying. Would you like to go with me?"

"Yes, father. But won't you take Missy?"

"Not if you will walk with me. It 's only about three miles."

"Very well, father. I should like to go with you."

My father talked about various things on the way. I remember in particular some remarks he made about reading Virgil, for I had just begun the Æneid. For one thing, he told me I must scan every line until I could make it sound like poetry, else I should neither enjoy it properly, nor be fair to the author. Then he repeated some lines from Milton, saying them first just as if they were prose, and after that the same lines as

they ought to be sounded, making me mark the difference. Next he did the same with a few of the opening lines of Virgil's great poem, and made me feel the difference there.

"The sound is the shape of it, you know, Ranald," he said, "for a poem is all for the ear and not for the eye. The eye sees only the sense of it; the ear sees the shape of it. To judge poetry without heeding the sound of it, is nearly as bad as to judge a rose by smelling it with your eyes shut. The sound, besides being a beautiful thing in itself, has a sense in it which helps the other out. A psalm tune, if it's the right one, helps you to see how beautiful the psalm is. Every poem carries its own tune in its own heart, and to read it aloud is the only way to bring out its tune."

I liked Virgil ever so much better after this, and always tried to get at the tune of it, and of every other poem I read.

"The right way of anything," said my father, "may be called the tune of it. We have to find out the tune of our own lives. Some people don't seem ever to find it out, and so their lives are a broken and uncomfortable thing to them—full of ups and downs and disappointments, and never going as it was meant to go."

"But what is the right tune of a body's life, father?"

"The will of God, my boy."

"But how is a person to know that, father?"

"By trying to do what he knows of it already. Everybody has a different kind of tune in his life, and

no one can find out another's tune for him, though he *may* help him to find it for himself."

"But aren't we to read the Bible, father?"

"Yes, if it's in order to obey it. To read the Bible thinking to please God by the mere reading of it, is to think like a heathen."

"And aren't we to say our prayers, father?"

"We are to ask God for what we want. If we don't want a thing, we are only acting like pagans to speak as if we did, and call it prayer, and think we are pleasing him."

I was silent. My father resumed.

"I fancy the old man we are going to see found out the tune of *his* life long ago."

"Is he a very wise man then, father?"

"That depends on what you mean by *wise*. *I* should call him a wise man, for to find out that tune is the truest wisdom. But he's not a learned man at all. I doubt if he ever read a book but the Bible, except perhaps the Pilgrim's Progress. I believe he has always been very fond of that. *You* like that—don't you, Ranald?"

"I've read it a good many times, father. But I was a little tired of it before I got through it last time."

"But you did read it through—did you—the last time, I mean?"

"Oh yes, father. I never like to leave the loose end of a thing hanging about."

"That 's right, my boy; that 's right. Well, I think you 'd better not open the book again for a long time —say twenty years at least. It 's a great deal too good a book to let yourself get tired of. By that time I trust you will be able to understand it a great deal better than you can at present."

I felt a little sorry that I was not to look at the Pilgrim's Progress for twenty years; but I am very glad of it now.

"We must not spoil good books by reading them too much," my father added. "It is often better to think about them than to read them; and it is best never to do either when we are tired of them. We should get tired of the sunlight itself, beautiful as it is, if God did not send it away every night. We 're not even fit to have moonlight always. The moon is buried in the darkness every month. And because we can bear nothing for any length of time together, we are sent to sleep every night, that we may begin fresh again in the morning."

"I see, father, I see," I answered.

We talked on until we came in sight of John Jamieson's cottage.

What a poor little place it was to look at—built of clay, which had hardened in the sun till it was just one brick! But it was a better place to live in than it looked, for no wind could come through the walls, although there was plenty of wind about. Three little windows looked eastward to the rising sun, and one

to the south: it had no more. It stood on the side of a heathy hill, which rose up steep behind it, and bending round sheltered it from the north. A low wall of loose stones enclosed a small garden, reclaimed from the hill, where grew some greens and cabbages and potatoes, with a flower here and there between. In summer it was pleasant enough, for the warm sun makes any place pleasant. But in winter it must have been a cold dreary place indeed. There was no other house within sight of it. A little brook went cantering down the hill close to the end of the cottage, singing merrily.

"It is a long way to the sea, but by its very nature the water will find it at last," said my father, pointing to the stream as we crossed it by the single stone that was its bridge.

He had to bend his head low to enter the cottage. An old woman, the sick man's wife, rose from the side of the chimney to greet us. My father asked how John was.

"Wearing away," was her answer. "But he'll be glad to see you."

We turned in the direction in which her eyes guided us. The first thing I saw was a small withered-looking head, and the next a withered-looking hand, large and bony. The old man lay in a bed closed in with boards, so that very little light fell upon him; but his hair glistened silvery through the gloom. My father drew a chair beside him. John looked up, and seeing who

it was, feebly held out his hand. My father took it and stroked it, and said:

"Well, John, my man, you 've had a hard life of it."

"No harder than I could bear," said John.

"It 's a grand thing to be able to say that," said my father.

"Oh sir! for that matter, I would go through it all again, if it was *his* will, and willingly. I have no will but his, sir."

"Well, John, I wish we could all say the same. When a man comes to that, the Lord lets him have what he wants. What do you want now, John?"

"To depart and be with the Lord. It wouldn't be true, sir, to say that I wasn't weary. It seems to me, if it 's the Lord's will, I 've had enough of this life. Even if death be a long sleep, as some people say, till the judgment, I think I would rather sleep, for I 'm very weary. Only there 's the old woman there! I don't like leaving her."

"But you can trust God for her too, can't you?"

"It would be a poor thing if I couldn't, sir."

"Were you ever hungry, John—dreadfully hungry, I mean?"

"Never longer than I could bear," he answered. "When you think it 's the will of God, hunger doesn't get much hold of you, sir."

"You must excuse me, John, for asking so many questions. You know God better than I do, and I want my young man here to know how strong the will

of God makes a man, old or young. He needn't care about anything else, need he?"

"There's nothing else to care about, sir. If only the will of God be done, everything's all right, you know. I do believe, sir, God cares more for me than my old woman herself does, and she's been as good a wife to me as ever was. Young gentleman, you know who says that God numbers the very hairs of our heads? There's not many of mine left to number," he added with a faint smile, "but there's plenty of yours. You mind the will of God, and he'll look after you. That's the way he divides the business of life."

I saw now that my father's talk as we came, had been with a view to prepare me for what John Jamieson would say. I cannot pretend, however, to have understood the old man at the time, but his words have often come back to me since, and helped me through trials pretty severe, although, like the old man, I have never found any of them too hard to bear.

"Have you no child to come and help your wife to wait upon you?" my father asked.

"I have had ten, sir, but only three are left alive. There'll be plenty to welcome me home when I go. One of the three's in Canada, and can't come. Another's in Australia, and he can't come. But Maggie's not far off, and she's got leave from her mistress to come for a week—only we don't want her to come till I'm nearer my end. I should like her to see the last

of her old father, for I shall be young again by the next time she sees me, please God, sir. He 's all in all—isn't he, sir?"

"True, John. If we have God, we have all things; for all things are his and we are his. But we mustn't weary you too much. Thank you for your good advice."

"I beg your pardon, sir; I had no intention of speaking like that. I never could give advice in all my life. I always found it was as much as I could do to take the good advice that was given to me. I should like to be prayed for in the church next Sunday, sir, if you please."

"But can't you pray for yourself, John?"

"Yes, sir; but I would like to have some spiritual gift because my friends asked it for me. Let them pray for more faith for me. I want more and more of that. The more you have, the more you want. Don't you, sir? And I mightn't ask enough for myself, now I 'm so old and so tired. I sleep a great deal, sir."

"Then don't you think God will take care to give you enough, even if you shouldn't ask for enough?" said my father.

"No doubt of that. But you see I am able to think of it now, and so I must put things in a train for the time when I shan't be able to think of it."

Something like this was what John said; and although I could not understand it then, my father spoke to me several times about it afterwards, and I came to

see how the old man wanted to provide against the evil time by starting prayers heavenward beforehand, as it were.

My father prayed by his bedside, pulled a parcel or two from his pocket for his wife, and then we walked home together in silence. My father was not the man to heap words upon words and so smother the thought that lay in them. He had taken me for the sake of the lesson I might receive, and he left it to strike root in my mind, which he judged more likely if it remained undisturbed.

CHAPTER XXVII.

TURKEY'S TRICK.

WHEN we came to the farm on our way home, we looked in to see Kirsty, but found the kev in the door, indicating that she had gone out. As we left the yard, we saw a strange-looking woman, to all appearance a beggar, approaching. She had a wallet over her shoulder, and walked stooping with her eyes on the ground, nor lifted them to greet us—behaviour which rarely showed itself in our parish. My father took no notice, but I could not help turning to look after the woman. To my surprise she stood looking after us, but the moment I turned, she turned also and walked on. When I looked again, she had vanished. Of course she must have gone into the farm-yard. Not liking the look of her, and remembering that Kirsty was out, I asked my father whether I had not better see if any of the men were about the stable. He approved, and I ran back to the house. The door was still locked. I called Turkey, and heard his voice in reply from one of the furthest of the cow-houses. When I had reached it and told him my story, he

asked if my father knew I had come back. When he heard that he did know, he threw down his pitchfork, and hastened with me. We searched every house about the place, but could find no sign whatever of the woman.

"Are you sure it wasn't all a fancy of your own, Ranald?" said Turkey.

"Quite sure. Ask my father. She passed as near us as you are to me now."

Turkey hurried away to search the hayloft once more, but without success; and at last I heard my father calling me.

I ran to him, and told him there was no woman to be seen.

"That's odd," he said. "She must have passed straight through the yard and got out at the other side before you went in. While you were looking for her, she was plodding away out of sight. Come along, and let us have our tea."

I could not feel quite satisfied about it, but, as there was no other explanation, I persuaded myself that my father was right.

The next Saturday evening I was in the nursery with my brothers. It was growing dusk, when I heard a knocking. Mrs. Mitchell did not seem to hear it, so I went and opened the door. There was the same beggar woman. Rather frightened, I called aloud, and Mrs. Mitchell came. When she saw it was a beggar, she went back and reappeared with a wooden

basin filled with meal, from which she took a handful as she came in apparent preparation for dropping it, in the customary way, into the woman's bag. The woman never spoke, but closed the mouth of her wallet, and turned away. Curiosity gave me courage to follow her. She walked with long strides in the direction of the farm, and I kept at a little distance behind her. She made for the yard. She should not escape me this time. As soon as she entered it, I ran as fast as I could, and just caught sight of her back as she went into one of the cow-houses. I darted after her. She turned round upon me—fiercely, I thought, but judge my surprise when she held out the open mouth of the bag towards me, and said—

"Not one grain, Ranald! Put in your hand and feel."

It was Turkey.

I stared in amazement, unable for a time to get rid of the apparition and see the reality. Turkey burst out laughing at my perplexed countenance.

"Why didn't you tell me before, Turkey?" I asked, able at length to join in the laugh.

"Because then you would have had to tell your father, and I did not want him to be troubled about it, at least before we had got things clear. I always *did* wonder how he could keep such a creature about him."

"He doesn't know her as we do, Turkey."

"No. She never gives him the chance. But now

Ranald, couldn't you manage to find out whether she makes any store of the meal she pretends to give away?"

A thought struck me.

"I heard Davie the other day asking her why she had two meal-tubs: perhaps that has something to do with it."

"You must find out. Don't ask Davie."

For the first time it occurred to me that the Kelpie had upon that night of terror been out on business of her own, and had not been looking for me at all.

"Then she was down at old Betty's cottage," said Turkey, when I communicated the suspicion, "and Wandering Willie was there too, and Andrew was right about the pipes. Willie hasn't been once to the house ever since he took Davie, but she has gone to meet him at Betty's. Depend on it, Ranald, he 's her brother, or nephew, or something, as I used to say. I do believe she gives him the meal to take home to her family somewhere. Did you ever hear anything about her friends?"

"I never heard her speak of any."

"Then I don't believe they 're respectable. I don't, Ranald. But it will be a great trouble to the minister to have to turn her away. I wonder if we couldn't contrive to make her go of herself. I wish we could scare her out of the country. It 's not nice either for a woman like that to have to do with such innocents as Allister and Davie."

"She 's very fond of Davie."

"So she is. That 's the only good thing I know of her. But hold your tongue, Ranald, till we find out more."

Acting on the hint Davie had given me, I soon discovered the second meal-tub. It was small, and carefully stowed away. It was now nearly full, and every day I watched in the hope that when she emptied it, I should be able to find out what she did with the meal. But Turkey's suggestion about frightening her away kept working in my brain.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

I SCHEME TOO.

I BEGAN a series of persecutions of the Kelpie on my own account. I was doubtful whether Turkey would approve of them, so I did not tell him for some time; but I was ambitious of showing him that I could do something without him. I doubt whether it is worth while to relate the silly tricks I played her—my father made me sorry enough for them afterwards. My only excuse for them is, that I hoped by them to drive the Kelpie away.

There was a closet in the hall, the floor of which was directly over the Kelpie's bed, with no ceiling between. With a gimlet I bored a hole in the floor, through which I passed a piece of string. I had already got a bit of black cloth, and sewed and stuffed it into something of the shape of a rat. Watching an opportunity, I tied this to the end of the string by the head, and hid it under her bolster. When she was going to bed, I went into the closet, and, laying my mouth to the floor, began squeaking like a rat, and scratching with my nails. Knowing by the exclama-

tion she made that I had attracted her attention, I tugged at the string; this lifted the bolster a little, and of course out came my rat. I heard her scream, and open her door. I pulled the rat up tight to the ceiling. Then the door of the nursery, where we slept only in the winter, opened and shut, and I concluded she had gone to bed there to avoid the rat. I could hardly sleep for pleasure at my success.

As she waited on us at breakfast next morning, she told my father that she had seen in her bed the biggest rat she ever saw in her life, and had not had a wink of sleep in consequence.

"Well," said my father, "that comes of not liking cats. You should get a pussy to take care of you."

She grumbled something and retired.

She removed her quarters to the nursery. But there it was yet easier for me to plague her. Having observed in which bed she lay, I passed the string with the rat at the end of it over the middle of a bar that ran across just above her head, then took the string along the top of the other bed, and through a little hole in the door. As soon as I judged her safe in bed, I dropped the rat with a plump. It must have fallen on or very near her face. I heard her give a loud cry, but before she could reach the door, I had fastened the string to a nail and got out of the way.

It was not so easy in those days to get a light, for the earliest form of lucifer match was only just making its appearance in that part of the country, and was very

dear: she had to go to the kitchen, where the fire never went out summer or winter. Afraid lest on her return she should search the bed, find my harmless animal suspended by the neck, and descend upon me with all the wrath generated of needless terror, I crept into the room, got down my rat, pulled away the string, and escaped. The next morning she said nothing about the rat, but went to a neighbour's and brought home a fine cat. I laughed in my sleeve, thinking how little her cat could protect her from my rat.

Once more, however, she changed her quarters, and went into a sort of inferior spare room in the upper part of the house, which suited my operations still better, for from my own bed I could now manage to drop and pull up the rat, drawing it away beyond the danger of discovery. The next night she took the cat into the room with her, and for that one I judged it prudent to leave her alone, but the next, having secured Kirsty's cat, I turned him into the room after she was in bed: the result was a frightful explosion of feline wrath.

I now thought I might boast of my successes to Turkey, but he was not pleased.

"She is sure to find you out, Ranald," he said, "and then whatever else we do will be a failure. Leave her alone till we have her quite."

I do not care to linger over this part of my story. I am a little ashamed of it.

We found at length that her private reservoir was

quite full of meal. I kept close watch still, and finding one night that she was not in the house, discovered also that the meal-tub was now empty. I ran to Turkey, and together we hurried to Betty's cottage.

It was a cloudy night, with glimpses of moonlight. When we reached the place, we heard voices talking, and were satisfied that both the Kelpie and Wandering Willie were there.

"We must wait till she comes out," said Turkey. "We must be able to say we saw her."

There was a great stone standing out of the ground not far from the door, just opposite the elder-tree, and the path lay between them.

"You get behind that tree—no, you are the smaller object—you get behind that stone, and I 'll get behind the tree," said Turkey; "and when the Kelpie comes out, you make a noise like a beast, and rush at her on all-fours."

"I 'm good at a pig, Turkey," I said. "Will a pig do?"

"Yes, well enough."

"But what if she should know me, and catch me, Turkey?"

"She will start away from you to my side; I shall rush out like a mad dog, and then she 'll run for it."

We waited a long time—a very long time, it seemed to me. It was well it was summer. We talked a little across, and that helped to beguile the weary time; but at last I said in a whisper:

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THE KELPIE FOUND OUT.

"Let's go home, Turkey, and lock the doors, and keep her out."

"You go home, then, Ranald, and I'll wait. I don't mind if it be till to-morrow morning. It is not enough to be sure ourselves; we must be able to make other people sure."

"I'll wait as long as you do, Turkey; only I'm very sleepy, and she might come out when I was asleep."

"Oh, I shall keep you awake!" replied Turkey; and we settled down again for a while.

At the long last the latch of the door was lifted. I was just falling asleep, but the sound brought me wide awake at once. I peeped from behind my shelter. It was the Kelpie, with an empty bag—a pillow-case, I believe—in her hand. Behind her came Wandering Willie, but did not follow her from the door. The moment was favourable, for the moon was under a thick cloud. Just as she reached the stone, I rushed out on hands and knees, grunting and squeaking like a very wild pig indeed. As Turkey had foretold, she darted aside, and I retreated behind my stone. The same instant Turkey rushed at her with such canine fury, that the imitation startled even me, who had expected it. You would have thought the animal was ready to tear a whole army to pieces, with such a complication of fierce growls and barks and squeals did he dart on the unfortunate culprit. She took to her heels at once, not daring to make for the cottage, because the enemy was behind her. But I had hardly

ensconced myself behind the stone, repressing my laughter with all my might, when I was seized from behind by Wandering Willie, who had no fear either of pig or dog. He began pommelling me.

"Turkey! Turkey!" I cried.

The cry stopped his barking pursuit of the Kelpie. He rose to his feet, and rushed to my aid. But when he saw the state of affairs, he turned at once for the cottage, crying,

"Now for a kick at the bagpipes!"

Wandering Willie was not too much a fool to remember and understand. He left me instantly, and made for the cottage. Turkey drew back and let him enter, then closed the door, and held it.

"Get away a bit, Ranald. I can run faster than Willie. You 'll be out of sight in a few yards."

But instead of coming after us, Wandering Willie began playing a most triumphant tune upon his darling bagpipes. How the poor old woman enjoyed it, I do not know. Perhaps she liked it. For us, we set off to outstrip the Kelpie. It did not matter to Turkey, but she might lock me out again. I was almost in bed before I heard her come in. She went straight to her own room.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A DOUBLE EXPOSURE.

WHETHER the Kelpie had recognized us I could not tell, but not much of the next morning passed before my doubt was over. When she had set our porridge on the table, she stood up, and, with her fists in her sides, addressed my father:

"I'm very sorry, sir, to have to make complaints. It's a thing I don't like, and I'm not given to. I'm sure I try to do my duty by Master Ranald as well as every one else in this house."

I felt a little confused, for I now saw clearly enough that my father could not approve of our proceedings. I whispered to Allister—

"Run and fetch Turkey. Tell him to come directly."

Allister always did whatever I asked him. He set off at once. The Kelpie looked suspicious as he left the room, but she had no pretext for interference. I allowed her to tell her tale without interruption. After relating exactly how we had served her the night before, when she had gone on a visit of mercy, as she represented it, she accused me of all my former tricks—that of the

cat having, I presume, enlightened her as to the others; and ended by saying that if she were not protected against me and Turkey, she must leave the place.

"Let her go, father," I said. "None of us like her."

"I like her," whimpered little Davie.

"Silence, sir!" said my father, very sternly. "Are these things true?"

"Yes, father," I answered. "But please hear what *I* 've got to say. She 's only told you *her* side of it."

"You have confessed to the truth of what she alleges," said my father. "I did think," he went on, more in sorrow than in anger, though a good deal in both, "that you had turned from your bad ways. To think of my taking you with me to the death-bed of a holy man, and then finding you so soon after playing such tricks! — more like the mischievousness of a monkey than of a human being!"

"I don't say it was right, father; and I 'm very sorry if I have offended you."

"You *have* offended me, and very deeply. You have been unkind and indeed cruel to a good woman who has done her best for you for many years!"

I was not too much abashed to take notice that the Kelpie bridled at this.

"I can't say I 'm sorry for what I 've done to her," I said.

"Really, Ranald, you are impertinent. I would send you out of the room at once, but you must beg

Mrs. Mitchell's pardon first, and after that there will be something more to say, I fear."

"But, father, you have not heard my story yet."

"Well—go on. It is fair, I suppose, to hear both sides. But nothing can justify such conduct."

I began with trembling voice. I had gone over in my mind the night before all I would say, knowing it better to tell the tale from the beginning circumstantially. Before I had ended, Turkey made his appearance, ushered in by Allister. Both were out of breath with running.

My father stopped me, and ordered Turkey away until I should have finished. I ventured to look up at the Kelpie once or twice. She had grown white, and grew whiter. When Turkey left the room, she would have gone too. But my father told her she must stay and hear me to the end. Several times she broke out, accusing me of telling a pack of wicked lies, but my father told her she should have an opportunity of defending herself, and she must not interrupt me. When I had done, he called Turkey, and made him tell the story. I need hardly say that, although he questioned us closely, he found no discrepancy between our accounts. He turned at last to Mrs. Mitchell, who, but for her rage, would have been in an abject condition.

"Now, Mrs. Mitchell!" he said.

She had nothing to reply beyond asserting that Turkey and I had always hated and persecuted her,

and had now told a pack of lies which we had agreed upon, to ruin her, a poor lone woman, with no friends to take her part.

"I do not think it likely they could be so wicked," said my father.

"So I 'm to be the only wicked person in the world! Very well, sir! I will leave the house this very day."

"No, no, Mrs. Mitchell; that won't do. One party or the other *is* very wicked—that is clear; and it is of the greatest consequence to me to find out which. If you go, I shall know it is you, and have you taken up and tried for stealing. Meantime I shall go the round of the parish. I do not think all the poor people will have combined to lie against you."

"They all hate me," said the Kelpie.

"And why?" asked my father.

She made no answer.

"I must get at the truth of it," said my father. "You can go now."

She left the room without another word, and my father turned to Turkey.

"I am surprised at you, Turkey, lending yourself to such silly pranks. Why did you not come and tell me?"

"I am very sorry, sir. I was afraid you would be troubled at finding how wicked she was, and I thought we might frighten her away somehow. But Ranald began his tricks without letting me know, and then I saw that mine could be of no use, for she would sus-

pect them after his. Mine would have been better, sir."

"I have no doubt of it, but equally unjustifiable. And you as well as he acted the part of a four-footed animal last night."

"I confess I yielded to temptation then, for I knew it could do no good. It was all for the pleasure of frightening her. It was very foolish of me, and I beg your pardon, sir."

"Well, Turkey, I confess you have vexed me, not by trying to find out the wrong she was doing me and the whole parish, but by taking the whole thing into your own hands. It is worse of you, inasmuch as you are older and far wiser than Ranald. It is worse of Ranald, because I was his father. I will try to show you the wrong you have done.—Had you told me, without doing anything yourselves, then I might have succeeded in bringing Mrs. Mitchell to repentance. I could have reasoned with her on the matter, and shown her that she was not merely a thief, but a thief of the worst kind, a Judas who robbed the poor, and so robbed God. I could have shown her how cruel she was——"

"Please, sir," interrupted Turkey, "I don't think after all she did it for herself. I do believe," he went on, and my father listened, "that Wandering Willie is some relation of hers. He is the only poor person, almost the only person except Davie, I ever saw her behave kindly to. He was there last night, and also,

I fancy, that other time, when Ranald got such a fright. She has poor relations somewhere, and sends the meal to them by Willie. You remember, sir, there were no old clothes of Allister's to be found when you wanted them for Jamie Duff."

"You may be right, Turkey—I daresay you are right. I hope you are, for though bad enough, that would not be quite so bad as doing it for herself."

"I am very sorry, father," I said; "I beg your pardon."

"I hope it will be a lesson to you, my boy. After what you have done, rousing every bad and angry passion in her, I fear it will be of no use to try to make her be sorry and repent. It is to her, not to me, you have done the wrong. I have nothing to complain of for myself—quite the contrary. But it is a very dreadful thing to throw difficulties in the way of repentance and turning from evil works."

"What can I do to make up for it?" I sobbed.

"I don't see at this moment what you can do. I will turn it over in my mind. You may go now."

Thereupon Turkey and I walked away, I to school, he to his cattle. The lecture my father had given us was not to be forgotten. Turkey looked sad, and I felt subdued and concerned.

Everything my father heard confirmed the tale we had told him. But the Kelpie frustrated whatever he may have resolved upon with regard to her: before he returned she had disappeared. How she managed to

get her chest away, I cannot tell. I think she must have hid it in some outhouse, and fetched it the next night. Many little things were missed from the house afterwards, but nothing of great value, and neither she nor Wandering Willie ever appeared again. We were all satisfied that poor old Betty knew nothing of her conduct. It was easy enough to deceive her, for she was alone in her cottage, only waited upon by a neighbour who visited her at certain times of the day.

My father, I heard afterwards, gave five shillings out of his own pocket to every one of the poor people whom the Kelpie had defrauded. Her place in the house was, to our endless happiness, taken by Kirsty, and faithfully she carried out my father's instructions that, along with the sacred handful of meal, a penny should be given to every one of the parish poor from that time forward, so long as he lived at the manse.

Not even little Davie cried when he found that Mrs. Mitchell was really gone. It was more his own affection than her kindness that had attached him to her.

Thus were we at last delivered from our Kelpie.

CHAPTER XXX.

TRIBULATION.

AFTER the expulsion of the Kelpie, and the accession of Kirsty, things went on so peaceably, that the whole time rests in my memory like a summer evening after sundown. I have therefore little more to say concerning our home-life.

There were two schools in the little town—the first, the parish school, the master of which was appointed by

the presbytery; the second, one chiefly upheld by the dissenters of the place, the master of which was appointed by the parents of the scholars. This difference, however, indicated very little of the distinction and separation which it would have involved in England. The masters of both were licentiates of the established church, an order having a vague resemblance to that of deacons in the English church; there were at both of them scholars whose fees were paid by the parish, while others at both were preparing for the University; there were many pupils at the second school whose parents took them to the established church on Sundays, and both were yearly examined by the presbytery —that is, the clergymen of a certain district; while my father was on friendly terms with all the parents, some of whom did not come to his church because they thought the expenses of religion should be met by the offerings of those who prized its ministrations, while others regarded the unity of the nation, and thought that religion, like any other of its necessities, ought to be the care of its chosen government. I do not think the second school would ever have come into existence at all except for the requirements of the population, one school being insufficient. There was little real schism in the matter, except between the boys themselves. They made far more of it than their parents, and an occasional outbreak was the consequence.

At this time there was at the second school a cer-

tain very rough lad, the least developed beyond the brute, perhaps, of all the scholars of the village. It is more amazing to see how close to the brute a man may remain than it is to see how far he may leave the brute behind. How it began I cannot recall; but this youth, a lad of seventeen, whether moved by dislike or the mere fascination of injury, was in the habit of teasing me beyond the verge of endurance as often as he had the chance. I did not like to complain to my father, though that would have been better than to hate him as I did. I was ashamed of my own impotence for self-defence; but therein I was little to blame, for I was not more than half his size, and certainly had not half his strength. My pride forbidding flight, the probability was, when we met in an out-of-the-way quarter, that he would block my path for half an hour at least, pull my hair, pinch my cheeks, and do everything to annoy me, short of leaving marks of violence upon me. If we met in a street, or other people were in sight, he would pass me with a wink and a grin, as much as to say—*Wait.*

One of the short but fierce wars between the rival schools broke out. What originated the individual quarrel I cannot tell. I doubt if any one knew. It had not endured a day, however, before it came to a pitched battle after school hours. The second school was considerably the smaller, but it had the advantage of being perched on the top of the low, steep hill at the bottom of which lay ours. Our battles always began

with missiles; and I wonder, as often as I recall the fact, that so few serious accidents were the consequence. From the disadvantages of the ground, we had little chance against the stone-showers which descended upon us like hail, except we charged right up the hill, in the face of the inferior but well-posted enemy. When this was not in favour at the moment, I employed myself in collecting stones and supplying them to my companions, for it seemed to me that every boy, down to the smallest in either school, was skilful in throwing them, except myself: I could not throw halfway up the hill. On this occasion, however, I began to fancy it an unworthy exercise of my fighting powers, and made my first attempt at organizing a troop for an up-hill charge. I was now a tall boy, and of some influence amongst those about my own age. Whether the enemy saw our intent and proceeded to forestall it, I cannot say, but certainly that charge never took place.

A house of some importance was then building, just on the top of the hill, and a sort of hand-waggon, or lurry on low wheels, was in use for moving the large stones employed, the chips from the dressing of which were then for us most formidable missiles. Our adversaries laid hold of this chariot, and turned it into an engine of war. They dragged it to the top of the hill, jumped upon it, as many as it would hold, and, drawn by their own weight, came thundering down upon our troops. Vain was the storm of stones which assailed

their advance: they could not have stopped if they would. My company had to open and make way for the advancing prodigy, conspicuous upon which towered my personal enemy Scroggie.

"Now," I called to my men, "as soon as the thing stops, rush in and seize them: they're not half our number. It will be an endless disgrace to let them go."

Whether we should have had the courage to carry out the design had not fortune favoured us, I cannot tell. But as soon as the chariot reached a part of the hill where the slope was less, it turned a little to one side, and Scroggie fell off, drawing half of the load after him. My men rushed in with shouts of defiant onset, but were arrested by the non-resistance of the foe. I sprung to seize Scroggie. He tried to get up, but fell back with a groan. The moment I saw his face, my mood changed. My hatred, without will or wish or effort of mine, turned all at once into pity or something better. In a moment I was down on my knees beside him. His face was white, and drops stood upon his forehead. He lay half upon his side, and with one hand he scooped handfuls of dirt from the road and threw them down again. His leg was broken. I got him to lean his head against me, and tried to make him lie more comfortably; but the moment I sought to move the leg he shrieked out. I sent one of our swiftest runners for the doctor, and in the meantime did the best I could for him. He took it as a matter of course, and did not even thank

me. When the doctor came, we got a mattress from a neighbouring house, laid it on the waggon, lifted Scroggie on the top, and dragged him up the hill and home to his mother.

I have said a little, but only a little, concerning our master, Mr. Wilson. At the last examination, I had, in compliance with the request of one of the clergymen, read aloud a metrical composition of my own, sent in by way of essay on the given subject, *Patriotism*, and after this he had shown me a great increase of favour. Perhaps he recognized in me some germ of a literary faculty—I cannot tell: it has never come to much if he did, and he must be greatly disappointed in me, seeing I labour not in living words, but in dead stones. I am certain, though, that whether I build good or bad houses, I should have built worse had I not had the insight he gave me into literature and the nature of literary utterance. I read Virgil and Horace with him, and scanned every doubtful line we came across. I sometimes think now, that what certain successful men want to make them real artists, is simply a knowledge of the literature — which is the essence of the possible art—of the country.

My brother Tom had left the school, and gone to the county town, to receive some final preparation for the University; consequently, so far as the school was concerned, I was no longer in the position of a younger brother. Also Mr. Wilson had discovered that I had some faculty for imparting what knowledge I possessed,

and had begun to make use of me in teaching the others. A good deal was done in this way in the Scotch schools. Not that there was the least attempt at system in it: the master, at any moment, would choose the one he thought fit, and set him to teach a class, while he attended to individuals, or taught another class himself. Nothing can be better for the verification of knowledge, or for the discovery of ignorance, than the attempt to teach. In my case it led to other and unforeseen results as well.

The increasing trust the master reposed in me, and the increasing favour which openly accompanied it, so stimulated the growth of my natural vanity, that at length it appeared in the form of presumption, and, I have little doubt, although I was unaware of it at the time, influenced my whole behaviour to my schoolfellows. Hence arose the complaint that I was a favourite with the master, and the accusation that I used underhand means to recommend myself to him, of which I am not yet aware that I was ever guilty. My presumption I confess, and wonder that the master did not take earlier measures to check it. When teaching a class, I would not unfrequently, if Mr. Wilson had vacated his chair, climb into it, and sit there as if I were the master of the school. I even went so far as to deposit some of my books in the master's desk, instead of in my own recess. But I had not the least suspicion of the indignation I was thus rousing against me.

One afternoon I had a class of history. They read very badly, with what seemed wilful blundering; but when it came to the questioning on the subject of the lesson, I soon saw there had been a conspiracy. The answers they gave were invariably wrong, generally absurd, sometimes utterly grotesque. I ought to except those of a few girls, who did their best, and apparently knew nothing of the design of the others. One or two girls, however, infected with the spirit of the game, soon outdid the whole class in the wildness of their replies. This at last got the better of me; I lost my temper, threw down my book, and retired to my seat, leaving the class where it stood. The master called me and asked the reason. I told him the truth of the matter. He got very angry, and called out several of the bigger boys and punished them severely. Whether these supposed that I had mentioned them in particular, as I had not, I do not know; but I could read in their faces that they vowed vengeance in their hearts. When the school broke up, I lingered to the last, in the hope they would all go home as usual; but when I came out with the master, and saw the silent waiting groups, it was evident there was more thunder in the moral atmosphere than would admit of easy discharge. The master had come to the same conclusion, for instead of turning towards his own house, he walked with me part of the way home, without alluding however to the reason. Allister was with us, and I led Davie by the hand: it was his first week of school life.

When we had got about half the distance, believing me now quite safe, he turned into a footpath and went through the fields back towards the town; while we, delivered from all immediate apprehension, jogged homewards.

When we had gone some distance farther, I happened to look about—why, I could not tell. A crowd was following us at full speed. As soon as they saw that we had discovered them, they broke the silence with a shout, which was followed by the patter of their many footsteps.

"Run, Allister!" I cried; and kneeling, I caught up Davie on my back, and ran with the feet of fear. Burdened thus, Allister was soon far ahead of me.

"Bring Turkey!" I cried after him. "Run to the farm as hard as you can pelt, and bring Turkey to meet us."

"Yes, yes, Ranald," shouted Allister, and ran yet faster.

They were not getting up with us quite so fast as they wished; they began therefore to pick up stones as they ran, and we soon heard them hailing on the road behind us. A little farther, and the stones began to go bounding past us, so that I dared no longer carry Davie on my back. I had to stop, which lost us time, and to shift him into my arms, which made running much harder. Davie kept calling, "Run, Ranald!—here they come!" and jumping so, half in fear, half in pleasure, that I found it very hard work indeed.

Their taunting voices reached me at length, loaded with all sorts of taunting and opprobrious words — some of them, I dare say, deserved, but not all. Next a stone struck me, but not in a dangerous place, though it crippled my running still more. The bridge was now in sight, however, and there I could get rid of Davie and turn at bay, for it was a small wooden bridge, with rails and a narrow gate at the end to keep horsemen from riding over it. The foremost of our pursuers were within a few yards of my heels, when, with a last effort, I bounded on it; and I had just time to set Davie down and turn and bar their way by shutting the gate, before they reached it. I had no breath left but just enough to cry, "Run, Davie!" Davie, however, had no notion of the state of affairs, and did not run, but stood behind me staring. So I was not much better off yet. If he had only run, and I had seen him far enough on the way home, I would have taken to the water, which was here pretty deep, before I would have run any further risk of their getting hold of me. If I could have reached the mill on the opposite bank, a shout would have brought the miller to my aid. But so long as I could prevent them from opening the gate, I thought I could hold the position. There was only a latch to secure it, but I pulled a thin knife from my pocket, and just as I received a blow in the face from the first arrival which knocked me backwards, I had jammed it over the latch through the iron staple in which it worked. Before

the first attempt to open it had been followed by the discovery of the obstacle, I was up, and the next moment, with a well-directed kick, disabled a few of the fingers which were fumbling to remove it. To protect the latch was now my main object, but my efforts would have been quite useless, for twenty of them would have been over the top in an instant. Help, however, although unrecognized as such, was making its way through the ranks of the enemy.

They parted asunder, and Scroggie, still lame, strode heavily up to the gate. Recalling nothing but his old enmity, I turned once more and implored Davie. "Do run, Davie, dear! it's all up," I said; but my entreaties were lost upon Davie. Turning again in despair, I saw the lame leg being hoisted over the gate. A shudder ran through me: I could *not* kick that leg; but I sprang up and hit Scroggie hard in the face. I might as well have hit a block of granite. He swore at me, caught hold of my hand, and turning to the assailants said:

"Now, you be off! This is my little business. I'll do for him!"

Although they were far enough from obeying his orders, they were not willing to turn him into an enemy, and so hung back expectant. Meantime the lame leg was on one side of the gate, the splints of which were sharpened at the points, and the sound leg was upon the other. I, on the one side—for he had let go my hand in order to support himself—retreated a little,

and stood upon the defensive, trembling, I must confess; while my enemies on the other side could not reach me so long as Scroggie was upon the top of the gate.

The lame leg went searching gently about, but could find no rest for the sole of its foot, for there was no projecting cross bar upon this side; the repose upon the top was anything but perfect, and the leg suspended behind was useless. The long and the short, both in legs and results, was, that there Scroggie stuck; and so long as he stuck, I was safe. As soon as I saw this, I turned and caught up Davie, thinking to make for home once more. But that very instant there was a rush at the gate; Scroggie was hoisted over, the knife was taken out, and on poured the assailants, before I had quite reached the other end of the bridge.

"At them, Oscar!" cried a voice.

The dog rushed past me on to the bridge, followed by Turkey. I set Davie down, and, holding his hand, breathed again. There was a scurry and a rush, a splash or two in the water, and then back came Oscar with his innocent tongue hanging out like a blood-red banner of victory. He was followed by Scroggie, who was exploding with laughter.

Oscar came up wagging his tail, and looking as pleased as if he had restored obedience to a flock of unruly sheep. I shrank back from Scroggie, wishing Turkey, who was still at the other end of the bridge, would make haste.

"Wasn't it fun, Ranald?" said Scroggie. "You don't think I was so lame that I couldn't get over that gate? I stuck on purpose."

Turkey joined us with an inquiring look, for he knew how Scroggie had been in the habit of treating me.

"It's all right, Turkey," I said. "Scroggie stuck on the gate on purpose."

"A good thing for you, Ranald!" said Turkey. "Didn't you see Peter Mason amongst them?"

"No. He left the school last year."

"He was there, though, and I don't suppose *he* meant to be agreeable."

"I tell you what," said Scroggie: "if you like, I'll leave my school and come to yours. My mother lets me do as I like."

I thanked him, but said I did not think there would be more of it. It would blow over.

Allister told my father as much as he knew of the affair; and when he questioned me, I told him as much as I knew.

The next morning, just as we were all settling to work, my father entered the school. The hush that followed was intense. The place might have been absolutely empty for any sound I could hear for some seconds. The ringleaders of my enemies held down their heads, as anticipating an outbreak of vengeance. But after a few moments' conversation with Mr. Wilson, my father departed. There was a mystery about the

proceeding, an unknown possibility of result, which had a very sedative effect the whole of the morning. When we broke up for dinner, Mr. Wilson detained me, and told me that my father thought it better that, for some time at least, I should not occupy such a prominent position as before. He was very sorry, he said, for I had been a great help to him; and if I did not object, he would ask my father to allow me to assist him in the evening-school during the winter. I was delighted at the prospect, sank back into my natural position, and met with no more annoyance. After a while I was able to assure my former foes that I had had no voice in bringing punishment upon them in particular, and the enmity was, I believe, quite extinguished.

When winter came, and the evening-school was opened, Mr. Wilson called at the manse, and my father very willingly assented to the proposed arrangement. The scholars were mostly young men from neighbouring farms, or from workshops in the village, with whom, although I was so much younger than they, there was no danger of jealousy. The additional assistance they would thus receive, and their respect for superior knowledge, in which, with my advantages, I had no credit over them, would prevent any false shame because of my inferiority in years.

There were a few girls at the school as well—among the rest, Elsie Duff. Although her grandmother was very feeble, Elsie was now able to have a little more of her own way, and there was no real reason why the

old woman should not be left for an hour or two in the evening. I need hardly say that Turkey was a regular attendant. He always, and I often, saw Elsie home.

My chief pleasure lay in helping her with her lessons. I did my best to assist all who wanted my aid, but offered unsolicited attention to her. She was not quick, but would never be satisfied until she understood, and that is more than any superiority of gifts. Hence, if her progress was slow, it was unintermitting. Turkey was far before me in trigonometry, but I was able to help him in grammar and geography; and when he commenced Latin, which he did the same winter, I assisted him a good deal.

Sometimes Mr. Wilson would ask me to go home with him after school, and take supper. This made me late, but my father did not mind it, for he liked me to be with Mr. Wilson. I learned a good deal from him at such times. He had an excellent little library, and would take down his favourite books and read me passages. It is wonderful how things which, in reading for ourselves, we might pass over in a half-blind manner, gain their true power and influence through the voice of one who sees and feels what is in them. If a man in whom you have confidence merely lays his finger on a paragraph and says to you, "Read that," you will probably discover three times as much in it as you would if you had only chanced upon it in the course of your reading. In such case the mind gathers itself up, and is all eyes and ears.

But Mr. Wilson would sometimes read me a few verses of his own; and this was a delight such as I have rarely experienced. My reader may wonder that a full-grown man and a good scholar should condescend to treat a boy like me as so much of an equal; but sympathy is precious even from a child, and Mr. Wilson had no companions of his own standing. I believe he read more to Turkey than to me, however.

As I have once apologized already for the introduction of a few of his verses with Scotch words in them, I will venture to try whether the same apology will not cover a second offence of the same sort.

JEANIE BRAW.*

I like ye weel upo' Sundays, Jeanie,
In yer goon an' yer ribbons gay;
But I like ye better on Mondays, Jeanie,
And I like ye better the day.†

For it *will* come into my heid, Jeanie,
O' yer braws‡ ye are thinkin' a wee;
No' a' o' the Bible-seed, Jeanie,
Nor the minister nor me.

And hame across the green, Jeanie,
Ye gang wi' a toss o' yer chin:
Us twa there 's a shadow atween, Jeanie,
Though yer hand my airm lies in.

But noo, whan I see ye gang, Jeanie,
Busy wi' what 's to be dune,
Liltin' a haveless§ sang, Jeanie,
I could kiss yer verra shune.

* Brave; well dressed. † To-day. ‡ Bravery; finery. § Careless.

Wi' yer silken net on yer hair, Jeanie,
In yer bonny blue petticoat,
Wi' yer kindly arms a' bare, Jeanie,
On yer verra shadow I doat.

For oh! but ye're eident* and free, Jeanie,
Airy o' hert and o' fit†;
There's a licht shines oot o' yer ee, Jeanie;
O' yersel' ye thinkna a bit.

Turnin' or steppin' alang, Jeanie,
Liftin' an' layin' doon,
Settin' richt what 's aye gaein' wrang, Jeanie
Yer motion 's baith dance an' tune.

Fillin' the cogue fra the coo, Jeanie,
Skimmin' the yallow cream,
Poorin' awa' the het broo, Jeanie,
Lichtin' the lampie's leme‡—

I' the hoose ye're a licht an' a law, Jeanie,
A servant like him that 's abune:
Oh! a woman 's bonniest o' a', Jeanie,
Whan she 's doin' what *maun* be dune.

Sae, dressed in yer Sunday claes, Jeanie,
Fair kythe§ ye amang the fair;
But dressed in yer ilka-day's,‖ Jeanie,
Yer beauty 's beyond compare.

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* Diligent. † Foot. ‡ Flame. § Appear.
‖ Every-day clothes.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A WINTER'S RIDE.

IN this winter, the stormiest I can recollect, occurred the chief adventure of my boyhood—indeed, the event most worthy to be called an adventure I have ever encountered.

There had been a tremendous fall of snow, which a furious wind, lasting two days and the night between, had drifted into great mounds, so that the shape of the country was much altered with new heights and hollows. Even those who were best acquainted with them could only guess at the direction of some of the roads, and it was the easiest thing in the world to lose the right track, even in broad daylight. As soon as the storm was over, however, and the frost was found likely to continue, they had begun to cut passages through some of the deeper wreaths, as they called the snow-mounds; while over the tops of others, and along the general line of the more frequented roads, footpaths were soon trodden. It was many days, however, before vehicles could pass, and coach-communication be resumed between the towns. All the short day, the sun, though

low, was brilliant, and the whole country shone with dazzling whiteness; but after sunset, which took place between three and four o'clock, anything more dreary can hardly be imagined, especially when the keenest of winds rushed in gusts from the north-east, and lifting the snow-powder from untrodden shadows, blew it, like so many stings, in the face of the freezing traveller.

Early one afternoon, just as I came home from school, which in winter was always over at three o'clock, my father received a message that a certain laird, or *squire* as he would be called in England—whose house lay three or four miles off amongst the hills, was at the point of death, and very anxious to see him: a groom on horseback had brought the message. The old man had led a life of indifferent repute, and that probably made him the more anxious to see my father, who proceeded at once to get ready for the uninviting journey.

Since my brother Tom's departure, I had become yet more of a companion to my father; and now when I saw him preparing to set out, I begged to be allowed to go with him. His little black mare had a daughter, not unused to the saddle. She was almost twice her mother's size, and none the less clumsy that she was chiefly employed upon the farm. Still she had a touch of the roadster in her, and if not capable of elegant motion, could get over the ground well enough, with a sort of speedy slouch, while, as was of far more consequence on an expedition like the present, she was

of great strength, and could go through the wreaths, Andrew said, like a red-hot iron.

My father hesitated, looked out at the sky, and hesitated still.

"I hardly know what to say, Ranald. If I were sure of the weather—but I am very doubtful. However, if it should break up, we can stay there all night. Yes.—Here, Allister; run and tell Andrew to saddle both the mares, and bring them down directly.—Make haste with your dinner, Ranald."

Delighted at the prospect, I did make haste; the meal was soon over, and Kirsty expended her utmost care in clothing me for the journey, which would certainly be a much longer one in regard of time than of space. In half an hour we were all mounted and on our way—the groom, who had so lately traversed the road, a few yards in front.

I have already said, perhaps more than once, that my father took comparatively little notice of us as children, beyond teaching us of a Sunday, and sometimes of a week-evening in winter, generally after we were in bed. He rarely fondled us, or did anything to supply in that manner the loss of our mother. I believe his thoughts were tenderness itself towards us, but they did not show themselves in ordinary shape: some connecting link was absent. It seems to me now sometimes, that perhaps he was wisely retentive of his feelings, and waited a better time to let them flow. For, ever as we grew older, we drew nearer to

my father, or, more properly, my father drew us nearer to him, dropping, by degrees, that reticence which, perhaps, too many parents of character keep up until their children are full-grown; and by this time he would converse with me most freely. I presume he had found, or believed he had found me trustworthy, and incapable of repeating unwisely any remarks he made. But much as he hated certain kinds of gossip, he believed that indifference to your neighbour and his affairs was worse. He said everything depended on the spirit in which men spoke of each other; that much of what was called gossip was only a natural love of biography, and, if kindly, was better than blameless; that the greater part of it was objectionable, simply because it was not loving, only curious; while a portion was amongst the wickedest things on earth, because it had for its object to believe and make others believe the worst. I mention these opinions of my father, lest any one should misjudge the fact of his talking to me as he did.

Our horses made very slow progress. It was almost nowhere possible to trot, and we had to plod on, step by step. This made it more easy to converse.

"The country looks dreary, doesn't it, Ranald?" he said.

"Just like as if everything was dead, father," I replied.

"If the sun were to cease shining altogether, what do you think would happen?"

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A WINTER RIDE.

I thought a bit, but was not prepared to answer, when my father spoke again.

"What makes the seeds grow, Ranald—the oats, and the wheat, and the barley?"

"The rain, father," I said, with half-knowledge.

"Well, if there were no sun, the vapours would not rise to make clouds. What rain there was already in the sky would come down in snow or lumps of ice. The earth would grow colder and colder, and harder and harder, until at last it went sweeping through the air, one frozen mass, as hard as stone, without a green leaf or a living creature upon it."

"How dreadful to think of, father!" I said. "That would be frightful."

"Yes, my boy. It is the sun that is the life of the world. Not only does he make the rain rise to fall on the seeds in the earth, but even that would be useless, if he did not make them warm as well—and do something else to them besides which we cannot understand. Farther down into the earth than any of the rays of light can reach, he sends other rays we cannot see, which go searching about in it, like long fingers; and wherever they find and touch a seed, the life that is in that seed begins to talk to itself, as it were, and straightway begins to grow. Out of the dark earth he thus brings all the lovely green things of the spring, and clothes the world with beauty, and sets the waters running, and the birds singing, and the lambs bleating, and the children gathering daisies and buttercups, and

the gladness overflowing in all hearts—very different from what we see now—isn't it, Ranald?"

"Yes, father; a body can hardly believe, to look at it now, that the world will ever be like that again."

"But, for as cold and wretched as it looks, the sun has not forsaken it. He has only drawn away from it a little, for good reasons, one of which is that we may learn that we cannot do without him. If he were to go, not one breath more could one of us draw. Horses and men, we should drop down frozen lumps, as hard as stones. Who is the sun's father, Ranald?"

"He hasn't got a father," I replied, hoping for some answer as to a riddle.

"Yes, he has, Ranald: I can prove that. You remember whom the apostle James calls the Father of Lights?"

"Oh yes, of course, father. But doesn't that mean another kind of lights?"

"Yes. But they couldn't be called lights if they were not like the sun. All kinds of lights must come from the Father of Lights. Now the Father of the sun must be like the sun, and, indeed of all material things, the sun is likest to God. We pray to God to shine upon us and give us light. If God did not shine into our hearts, they would be dead lumps of cold. We shouldn't care for anything whatever."

"Then, father, God never stops shining upon us. He wouldn't be like the sun if he did. For even in winter the sun shines enough to keep us alive."

"True, my boy. I am very glad you understand me. In all my experience I have never yet known a man in whose heart I could not find proofs of the shining of the great Sun. It might be a very feeble wintry shine, but still he was there. For a human heart though, it is very dreadful to have a cold, white winter like this inside it, instead of a summer of colour and warmth and light. There's the poor old man we are going to see. They talk of the winter of age: that's all very well, but the heart is not made for winter. A man may have the snow on his roof, and merry children about his hearth; he may have grey hairs on his head, and the very gladness of summer in his bosom. But this old man, I am afraid, feels wintry cold within."

"Then why doesn't the Father of Lights shine more on him and make him warmer?"

"The sun is shining as much on the earth in the winter as in the summer: why is the earth no warmer?"

"Because," I answered, calling up what little astronomy I knew, "that part of it is turned away from the sun."

"Just so. Then if a man turns himself away from the Father of Lights—the great Sun—how can he be warmed?"

"But the earth can't help it, father."

"But the man can, Ranald. He feels the cold, and he knows he can turn to the light. Even this poor old man knows it now. God is shining on him—a wintry

way—or he would not feel the cold at all; he would be only a lump of ice, a part of the very winter itself. The good of what warmth God gives him is, that he feels cold. If he were all cold, he couldn't feel cold."

"Does he want to turn to the Sun, then, father?"

"I do not know. I only know that he is miserable because he has not turned to the Sun."

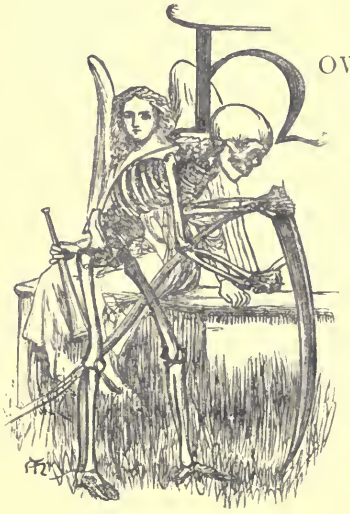
"What will you say to him, father?"

"I cannot tell, my boy. It depends on what I find him thinking. Of all things, my boy, keep your face to the Sun. You can't shine of yourself, you can't be good of yourself, but God has made you able to turn to the Sun whence all goodness and all shining comes. God's children may be very naughty, but they must be able to turn towards him. The Father of Lights is the Father of every weakest little baby of a good thought in us, as well as of the highest devotion of martyrdom. If you turn your face to the Sun, my boy, your soul will, when you come to die, feel like an autumn, with the golden fruits of the earth hanging in rich clusters ready to be gathered—not like a winter. You may feel ever so worn, but you will not feel withered. You will die in peace, hoping for the spring—and such a spring!"

Thus talking, in the course of two hours or so we arrived at the dwelling of the old laird.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE PEAT-STACK.



OW dreary the old house looked as we approached it through the gathering darkness! All the light appeared to come from the snow which rested wherever it could lie — on roofs and window-ledges and turrets. Even on the windward walls, every little roughness sustained its own frozen patch, so that their gray was spotted all over with whiteness. Not a glimmer shone from the windows.

"Nobody lives *there*, father," I said,—"surely?"

"It does not look very lively," he answered.

The house stood upon a bare knoll. There was not a tree within sight. Rugged hills arose on all sides of it. Not a sound was heard but the moan of an occasional gust of wind. There was a brook, but it lay frozen beneath yards of snow. For miles in any direction those gusts might wander without shaking door or window, or carrying with them a puff of smoke from any hearth. We were crossing the yard at the back of the house, towards the kitchen-door, for the front door had not been opened for months, when we recognized the first sign of life. That was only the low of a bullock. As we dismounted on a few feet of rough pavement which had been swept clear, an old woman came to the door, and led us into a dreary parlour without even a fire to welcome us.

I learned afterwards that the laird, from being a spendthrift in his youth, had become a miser in his age, and that every household arrangement was on the narrowest scale. From wasting righteous pounds, he had come to scraping unrighteous farthings.

After we had remained standing for some time, the housekeeper returned, and invited my father to go to the laird's room. As they went, he requested her to take me to the kitchen, which, after conducting him, she did. The sight of the fire, although it was of the smallest, was most welcome. She laid a few more peats upon it, and encouraged them to a blaze, remarking, with a sidelong look: "We daren't do this.

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THE DYING LAIRD.

you see, sir, if the laird was about. The honest man would call it waste."

"Is he dying?" I asked, for the sake of saying something; but she only shook her head for reply, and, going to a press at the other end of the large, vault-like kitchen, brought me some milk in a basin, and some oatcake upon a platter, saying,

"It 's not my house, you see, or I would have something better to set before the minister's son."

I was glad of any food however, and it was well for me that I ate heartily. I had got quite warm also before my father stepped into the kitchen, very solemn, and stood up with his back to the fire. The old woman set him a chair, but he neither sat down nor accepted the refreshment which she humbly offered him.

"We must be going," he objected, "for it looks stormy, and the sooner we set out the better."

"I 'm sorry I can't ask you to stop the night," she said, "for I couldn't make you comfortable. There 's nothing fit to offer you in the house, and there 's not a bed that 's been slept in for I don't know how long."

"Never mind," said my father cheerfully. "The moon is up already, and we shall get home I trust before the snow begins to fall. Will you tell the man to get the horses out?"

When she returned from taking the message, she came up to my father and said, in a loud whisper,

"Is he in a bad way, sir?"

"He is dying," answered my father.

"I know that," she returned. "He 'll be gone before the morning. But that 's not what I meant. Is he in a bad way for the other world? That 's what I meant, sir."

"Well, my good woman, after a life like his, we are only too glad to remember what our Lord told us—not to judge. I do think he is ashamed and sorry for his past life. But it 's not the wrong he has done in former time that stands half so much in his way as his present fondness for what he counts his own. It seems like to break his heart to leave all his little bits of property—particularly the money he has saved; and yet he has some hope that Jesus Christ will be kind enough to pardon him. I am afraid he will find himself very miserable though, when he has not one scrap left to call his own—not a pocket-knife even."

"It 's dreadful to think of him flying through the air on a night like this," said she.

"My good woman," returned my father, "we know nothing about where or how the departed spirit exists after it has left the body. But it seems to me just as dreadful to be without God in the world, as to be without him anywhere else. Let us pray for him that God may be with him wherever he is."

So saying, my father knelt down, and we beside him, and he prayed earnestly to God for the old man. Then we rose, mounted our horses, and rode away.

We were only about half-way home, when the clouds

began to cover the moon, and the snow began to fall. Hitherto we had got on pretty well, for there was light enough to see the track, feeble as it was. Now, however, we had to keep a careful look out. We pressed our horses, and they went bravely, but it was slow work at the best. It got darker and darker, for the clouds went on gathering, and the snow was coming down in huge dull flakes. Faster and thicker they came, until at length we could see nothing of the road before us, and were compelled to leave all to the wisdom of our horses. My father, having great confidence in his own little mare, which had carried him through many a doubtful and difficult place, rode first. I followed close behind. He kept on talking to me very cheerfully—I have thought since—to prevent me from getting frightened. But I had not a thought of fear. To be with my father was to me perfect safety. He was in the act of telling me how, on more occasions than one, Missy had got him through places where the road was impassable, by walking on the tops of the walls, when all at once both our horses plunged into a gulf of snow. The more my mare struggled, the deeper we sank in it. For a moment I thought it was closing over my head.

"Father! father!" I shouted.

"Don't be frightened, my boy," cried my father, his voice seeming to come from far away. "We are in God's hands. I can't help you now, but as soon as Missy has got quieter, I shall come to you. I think I

know whereabouts we are. We've dropped right off the road. You're not hurt, are you?"

"Not in the least," I answered. "I was only frightened."

A few moments more, and my mare lay or rather stuck quiet, with her neck and head thrown back, and her body deep in the snow. I put up my hands to feel. It rose above my head farther than I could reach. I got clear of the stirrups and scrambled up, first on my knees, and then on my feet. Standing thus upon the saddle, again I stretched my hands above my head, but still the broken wall of snow ascended above my reach. I could see nothing of my father, but I heard him talking to Missy. My mare soon began floundering again, so that I tumbled about against the sides of the hole, and grew terrified lest I should bring the snow down. I therefore cowered upon the mare's back until she was quiet again. "Woa! Quiet, my lass!" I heard my father saying, and it seemed his Missy was more frightened than mine.

My fear was now quite gone, and I felt much inclined to laugh at the fun of the misadventure. I had as yet no idea of how serious a thing it might be. Still I had sense enough to see that something must be done—but what? I saw no way of getting out of the hole except by trampling down the snow upon the back of my poor mare, and that I could not think of; while I doubted much whether my father even could

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LOST IN A SNOW WREATH.

tell in what direction to turn for help or shelter. Finding our way home, even if we got free, seemed out of the question. Again my mare began plunging violently, and this time I found myself thrown against some hard substance. I thrust my hand through the snow, and felt what I thought the stones of one of the dry walls common to the country. I might clear away enough of the snow to climb upon that; but then what next —it was so dark?

"Ranald!" cried my father; "how do you get on?"

"Much the same, father," I answered.

"I'm out of the wreath," he returned. "We've come through on the other side. You are better where you are I suspect, however. The snow is warmer than the air. It is beginning to blow. Pull your feet out and get right upon the mare's back."

"That's just where I am, father—lying on her back, and pretty comfortable," I rejoined.

All this time the snow was falling thick. If it went on like this, I should be buried before morning, and the fact that the wind was rising added to the danger of it. We were at the wrong end of the night too.

"I'm in a kind of ditch, I think, father," I cried—"between the place we fell off on one side and a stone wall on the other."

"That can hardly be, or I shouldn't have got out," he returned. "But now I've got Missy quiet, I'll come to you. I must get you out, I see, or you will be snowed up. Woa, Missy! Good mare! Stand still."

The next moment, he gave a joyous exclamation.

"What is it, father?" I cried.

"It's not a stone wall; it's a peat-stack. That *is* good."

"I don't see what good it is. We can't light a fire.'

"No, my boy; but where there's a peat-stack, there's probably a house."

He began uttering a series of shouts at the top of his voice, listening between for a response. This lasted a good while. I began to get very cold.

"I'm nearly frozen, father," I said, "and what's to become of the poor mare—she's got no clothes on?"

"I'll get you out, my boy; and then at least you will be able to move about a little."

I heard him shovelling at the snow with his hands and feet.

"I have got to the corner of the stack, and as well as I can judge you must be just round it," he said.

"Your voice is close to me," I answered.

"I've got a hold of one of the mare's ears," he said next. "I won't try to get her out until I get you off her."

I put out my hand, and felt along the mare's neck. What a joy it was to catch my father's hand through the darkness and the snow! He grasped mine and drew me towards him, then got me by the arm and began dragging me through the snow. The mare began plunging again, and by her struggles rather assisted my father. In a few moments he had me in his arms

"Thank God!" he said, as he set me down against the peat-stack. "Stand there. A little further. Keep well off for fear she hurt you. She must fight her way out now."

He went back to the mare, and went on clearing away the snow. Then I could hear him patting and encouraging her. Next I heard a great blowing and scrambling, and at last a snort and the thunder of hoofs.

"Woa! woa! Gently! gently!—She 's off!" cried my father.

Her mother gave one snort, and away she went, thundering after her. But their sounds were soon quenched in the snow.

"There 's a business!" said my father. "I 'm afraid the poor things will only go farther to fare the worse. We are as well without them, however; and if they should find their way home, so much the better for us. They might have kept us a little warmer though. We must fight the cold as we best can for the rest of the night, for it would only be folly to leave the spot before it is light enough to see where we are going."

It came into my mind suddenly how I had burrowed in the straw to hide myself after running from Dame Shand's. But whether that or the thought of burrowing in the peat-stack came first, I cannot tell. I turned and felt whether I could draw out a peat. With a little loosening I succeeded.

"Father," I said, "couldn't we make a hole in the peat-stack, and build ourselves in?"

"A capital idea, my boy!" he answered, with a glad ness in his voice which I venture to attribute in part to his satisfaction at finding that I had some practical sense in me. "We 'll try it at once."

"I 've got two or three out already," I said, for I had gone on pulling, and it was easy enough after one had been started.

"We must take care we don't bring down the whole stack though," said my father.

"Even then," I returned, "we could build ourselves up in them, and that would be something."

"Right, Ranald! It would be only making houses to our own shape, instead of big enough to move about in—turning crustaceous animals, you know."

"It would be a peat-greatcoat at least," I remarked, pulling away.

"Here," he said, "I will put my stick in under the top row. That will be a sort of lintel to support those above."

He always carried his walking-stick whether he rode or walked.

We worked with a will, piling up the peats a little in front that we might with them build up the door of our cave after we were inside. We got quite merry over it.

"We shall be brought before the magistrates for destruction of property," said my father.

"You 'll have to send Andrew to build up the stack again—that 's all."

"But I wonder how it is that nobody hears us. How can they have a peat-stack so far from the house?"

"I can't imagine," I said; "except it be to prevent them from burning too many peats. It is more like a trick of the poor laird than anybody else."

Every now and then a few would come down with a rush, and before long we had made a large hole. We left a good thick floor to sit upon.

Creeping in, we commenced building up the entrance. We had not proceeded far, however, before we found that our cave was too small, and that as we should have to remain in it for hours, we must find it very cramped. Therefore, instead of using any more of the peats already pulled out, we finished building up the wall with others fresh drawn from the inside. When at length we had, to the best of our ability, completed our immuring, we sat down to wait for the morning—my father as calm as if he had been seated in his study-chair, and I in a state of condensed delight; for was not this a grand adventure—with my father to share it, and keep it from going too far? He sat with his back leaning against the side of the hole, and I sat between his knees, and leaned against him. His arms were folded round me; and could ever boy be more blessed than I was then? The sense of outside danger; the knowledge that if the wind rose, we might be walled up in snow before the morning; the assurance of present safety and good hope—all made such an impression upon my mind that ever since

when any trouble has threatened me, I have invariably turned first in thought to the memory of that harbour of refuge from the storm. There I sat for long hours secure in my father's arms, and knew that the soundless snow was falling thick around us, and marked occasionally the threatening wail of the wind like the cry of a wild beast scenting us from afar.

"This is grand, father," I said.

"You would like better to be at home in bed, wouldn't you?" he asked, trying me.

"No, indeed, I should not," I answered, with more than honesty; for I felt exuberantly happy.

"If only we can keep warm," said my father. "If you should get very cold indeed, you must not lose heart, my man, but think how pleasant it will be when we get home to a good fire and a hot breakfast."

"I think I can bear it all right. I have often been cold enough at school."

"This may be worse. But we need not anticipate evil: that is to send out for the suffering. It is well to be prepared for it, but it is ill to brood over a fancied future of evil. In all my life, my boy—and I should like you to remember what I say—I have never found any trial go beyond what I could bear. In the worst cases of suffering, I think there is help given which those who look on cannot understand, but which enables the sufferer to endure. The last help of that kind is death, which I think is always a blessing, though few people can regard it as such."

I listened with some wonder. Without being able to see that what he said was true, I could yet accept it after a vague fashion.

"This nest which we have made to shelter us," he resumed, "brings to my mind what the Psalmist says about dwelling in the secret place of the Most High. Every one who will, may there, like the swallow, make himself a nest."

"This can't be very like that, though, surely, father," I ventured to object.

"Why not, my boy?"

"It's not safe enough, for one thing."

"You are right there. Still it is like. It is our place of refuge."

"The cold does get through it, father."

"But it keeps our minds at peace. Even the refuge in God does not always secure us from external suffering. The heart may be quite happy and strong when the hands are benumbed with cold. Yes, the heart even may grow cold with coming death, while the man himself retreats the farther into the secret place of the Most High, growing more calm and hopeful as the last cold invades the house of his body. I believe that all troubles come to drive us into that refuge — that secret place where alone we can be safe. You will, when you go out into the world, my boy, find that most men not only do not believe this, but do not believe that you believe it. They regard it at best as a fantastic weakness, fit only for sickly people. But

watch how the strength of such people, their calmness and common sense, fares when the grasp of suffering lays hold upon them. It was a sad sight—that abject hopeless misery I saw this afternoon. If his mind had been an indication of the reality, one must have said that there was no God—no God at least that would have anything to do with him. The universe as reflected in the tarnished mirror of his soul, was a chill misty void, through which blew the moaning wind of an unknown fate. As near as ever I saw it, that man was without God and without hope in the world. All who have done the mightiest things—I do not mean the showiest things — all that are like William of Orange — the great William, I mean, not our King William—or John Milton, or William Penn, or any other of the cloud of witnesses spoken of in the Epistle to the Hebrews — all the men I say who have done the mightiest things, have not only believed that there was this refuge in God, but have themselves more or less entered into the secret place of the Most High. There only could they have found strength to do their mighty deeds. They were able to do them because they knew God wanted them to do them, that he was on their side, or rather they were on his side, and therefore safe, surrounded by God on every side. My boy, do the will of God—that is, what you know or believe to be right, and fear nothing."

I never forgot the lesson. But my readers must not think that my father often talked like this. He was

not at all favourable to much talk about religion. He used to say that much talk prevented much thought, and talk without thought was bad. Therefore it was for the most part only upon extraordinary occasions, of which this is an example, that he spoke of the deep simplicities of that faith in God which was the very root of his conscious life.

He was silent after this utterance, which lasted longer than I have represented, although unbroken, I believe, by any remark of mine. Full of inward repose, I fell asleep in his arms.

When I awoke I found myself very cold. Then I became aware that my father was asleep, and for the first time began to be uneasy. It was not because of the cold: that was not at all unendurable; it was that while the night lay awful in white silence about me, while the wind was moaning outside and blowing long thin currents through the peat walls around me, while our warm home lay far away, and I could not tell how many hours of cold darkness had yet to pass before we could set out to find it,—it was not all these things together, but that, in the midst of all these, I was awake and my father slept. I could easily have waked him, but I was not selfish enough for that: I sat still and shivered and felt very dreary. Then the last words of my father began to return upon me, and, with a throb of relief, the thought awoke in my mind that, although my father was asleep, the great Father of us both, he in whose heart lay that secret place of

refuge, neither slumbered nor slept. And now I was able to wait in patience, with an idea, if not a sense of the present care of God, such as I had never had before. When, after some years, my father was taken from us, the thought of this night came again and again, and I would say in my heart: "My father sleeps that I may know the better that The Father wakes."

At length he stirred. The first sign of his awaking was, that he closed again the arms about me which had dropped by his sides as he slept.

"I'm so glad you're awake, father," I said, speaking first.

"Have *you* been long awake then?" he asked.

"Not so very long, but I felt lonely without you."

"Are you very cold? *I* feel rather chilly."

So we chatted away for a while.

"I wonder if it is nearly day yet. I do not in the least know how long we have slept. I wonder if my watch is going. I forgot to wind it up last night. If it has stopped, I shall know it is near daylight."

He held his watch to his ear: alas! it was ticking vigorously. He felt for the key-hole, and wound it up. After that we employed ourselves in repeating as many of the metrical psalms and paraphrases of Scripture as we could recollect, and this helped away a good part of the weary time.

But it went very slowly, and I was growing so cold that I could hardly bear it.

"I'm afraid you feel very cold, Ranald," said my

father, folding me closer in his arms. "You must try not to go to sleep again, for that would be dangerous now. I feel more cramped than cold."

As he said this, he extended his legs and threw his head back, to get rid of the uneasiness by stretching himself. The same moment, down came a shower of peats upon our heads and bodies, and when I tried to move, I found myself fixed. I could not help laughing.

"Father," I cried, as soon as I could speak, "you're like Samson: you've brought down the house upon us."

"So I have, my boy. It was very thoughtless of me I don't know what we *are* to do now."

"Can you move, father? *I* can't," I said.

"I can move my legs, but I'm afraid to move even a toe in my boot for fear of bringing down another avalanche of peats. But no—there's not much danger of that: they are all down already, for I feel the snow on my face."

With hands and feet my father struggled, but could not do much, for I lay against him under a great heap. His struggles made an opening sideways however.

"Father! father! shout," I cried. "I see a light somewhere; and I think it is moving."

We shouted as loud as we could, and then lay listening. My heart beat so that I was afraid I should not hear any reply that might come. But the next moment it rang through the frosty air.

"It's Turkey! That's Turkey, father!" I cried.

"I know his shout. He makes it go farther than anybody else. — Turkey! Turkey!" I shrieked, almost weeping with delight.

Again Turkey's cry rang through the darkness, and the light drew wavering nearer.

"Mind how you step, Turkey," cried my father. "There 's a hole you may tumble into."

"It wouldn't hurt him much in the snow," I said.

"Perhaps not, but he would probably lose his light, and that we can hardly afford."

"Shout again," cried Turkey. "I can't make out where you are."

My father shouted.

"Am I coming nearer to you now?"

"I can hardly say. I cannot see well. Are you going along the road?"

"Yes. Can't you come to me?"

"Not yet. We can't get out. We 're upon your right hand, in a peat-stack."

"Oh! I know the peat-stack. I 'll be with you in a moment."

He did not however find it so easily as he had expected, the peats being covered with snow. My father gave up trying to free himself and took to laughing instead at the ridiculous situation in which we were about to be discovered. He kept directing Turkey, however, who at length after some disappearances which made us very anxious about the lantern, caught sight of the stack, and walked straight towards it.

Now first we saw that he was not alone, but accompanied by the silent Andrew.

"Where are you, sir?" asked Turkey, throwing the light of the lantern over the ruin.

"Buried in the peats," answered my father, laughing "Come and get us out."

Turkey strode up to the heap, and turning the light down into it said,

"I didn't know it had been raining peats, sir."

"The peats didn't fall quite so far as the snow, Turkey, or they would have made a worse job of it," answered my father.

Meantime Andrew and Turkey were both busy; and in a few moments we stood upon our feet, stiff with cold and cramped with confinement, but merry enough at heart.

"What brought you out to look for us?" asked my father.

"I heard Missy whinnying at the stable-door," said Andrew. "When I saw she was alone, I knew something had happened, and waked Turkey. We only stopped to run to the manse for a drop of whisky to bring with us, and set out at once."

"What o'clock is it now?" asked my father.

"About one o'clock," answered Andrew.

"One o'clock!" thought I. "What a time we should have had to wait!"

"Have you been long in finding us?"

"Only about an hour."

"Then the little mare must have had great trouble in getting home. You say the other was not with her?"

"No, sir. She's not made her appearance."

"Then if we don't find her, she will be dead before morning. But what shall we do with you, Ranald? Turkey had better go home with you first."

"Please let me go too," I said.

"Are you able to walk?"

"Quite—or at least I shall be, after my legs come to themselves a bit."

Turkey produced a bottle of milk which he had brought for me, and Andrew produced the little flask of whisky which Kirsty had sent; and my father having taken a little of the latter, while I emptied my bottle, we set out to look for young Missy.

"Where are we?" asked my father.

Turkey told him.

"How comes it that nobody heard our shouting, then?"

"You know, sir," answered Turkey, "the old man is as deaf as a post, and I dare say his people were all fast asleep."

The snow was falling only in a few large flakes now, which sank through the air like the moultings of some lovely bird of heaven. The moon had come out again, and the white world lay around us in lovely light. A good deal of snow had fallen while we lay in the peats, but we could yet trace the track of the two horses. We followed it a long way through the little valley into

which we had dropped from the side of the road. We came to more places than one where they had been floundering together in a snow-wreath, but at length reached the spot where one had parted from the other. When we had traced one of the tracks to the road, we concluded it was Missy's, and returned to the other. But we had not followed it very far before we came upon the poor mare lying upon her back in a deep runnel, in which the snow was very soft. She had put her fore-feet in it as she galloped heedlessly along, and tumbled right over. The snow had yielded enough to let the banks get a hold of her, and she lay helpless. Turkey and Andrew, however, had had the foresight to bring spades with them and a rope, and they set to work at once, my father taking a turn now and then, and I holding the lantern, which was all but useless now in the moonlight. It took more than an hour to get the poor thing on her legs again, but when she was up, it was all they could do to hold her. She was so wild with cold, and with delight at feeling her legs under her once more, that she would have broken loose again, and galloped off as recklessly as ever. They set me on her back, and with my father on one side and Turkey on the other, and Andrew at her head, I rode home in great comfort. It was another good hour before we arrived, and right glad were we to see through the curtains of the parlour the glow of the great fire which Kirsty had kept up for us. She burst out crying when we made our appearance.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A SOLITARY CHAPTER.

DURING all that winter I attended the evening school and assisted the master. I confess however it was not by any means so much for the master as to be near Elsie Duff, of whom I now thought many times an hour. Her sweet face grew more and more dear to me. When I pointed out an error in her work, or suggested a better mode of working, it would flush like the heart of a white rose, and eagerly she would set herself to rectification or improvement, her whole manner a dumb apology for what could be a fault in

no eyes but her own. It was this sweetness that gained upon me: at length her face was almost a part of my consciousness. I suppose my condition was what people would call being in love with her; but I never thought of that; I only thought of her. Nor did I ever dream of saying a word to her on the subject. I wished nothing other than as it was. To think about her all day, so gently that it never disturbed Euclid or Livy; to see her at night, and get near her now and then, sitting on the same form with her as I explained something to her on the slate or in her book; to hear her voice, and look into her tender eyes, was all that I desired. It never occurred to me that things could not go on so; that a change must come; that as life cannot linger in the bud, but is compelled by the sunshine and air into the flower, so life would go on and on, and things would change, and the time blossom into something else, and my love find itself set out of doors in the midst of strange plants and a new order of things.

When school was over, I walked home with her—not alone, for Turkey was always on the other side. I had not a suspicion that Turkey's admiration of Elsie could ever come into collision with mine. We joined in praising her, but my admiration ever found more words than Turkey's, and I thought my love to her was greater than his.

We seldom went into her grandmother's cottage, for she did not make us welcome. After we had taken

her home we generally repaired to Turkey's mother, with whom we were sure of a kind reception. She was a patient diligent woman, who looked as if she had nearly done with life, and had only to gather up the crumbs of it. I have often wondered since, what was her deepest thought—whether she was content to be unhappy, or whether she lived in hope of some blessedness beyond. It is marvellous with how little happiness some people can get through the world. Surely they are inwardly sustained with something even better than joy.

"Did you ever hear my mother sing?" asked Turkey, as we sat together over her little fire, on one of these occasions.

"No. I should like very much," I answered.

The room was lighted only by a little oil-lamp, for there was no flame to the fire of peats and dried oak-bark.

"She sings such queer ballads as you never heard," said Turkey. "Give us one, mother; do."

She yielded, and, in a low chanting voice, sang something like this:—

Up cam' the waves o' the tide wi' a whush,
And back gaed the pebbles wi' a whurr,
Whan the king's ae son cam' walking i' the hush,
To hear the sea murmur and murr.

The half mune was risin' the waves abune,
An' a glimmer o' cauld weet licht
Cam' ower the water straucht frae the mune,
Like a path across the nicht.

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"HE TOOK HER, AND HOME HE SPED."

What 's that, an' that, far oot i' the gray
  Atwixt the mune and the land?
It 's the bonny sea-maidens at their play—
  Haud awa', king's son, frae the strand.

Ae rock stud up wi' a shadow at its foot:
  The king's son stepped behind;
The merry sea-maidens cam' gambolling oot,
  Combin' their hair i' the wind.

O merry their laugh when they felt the land
  Under their light cool feet!
Each laid her comb on the yellow sand,
  And the gladsome dance grew fleet.

But the fairest she laid her comb by itsel'
  On the rock where the king's son lay.
He stole about, and the carven shell
  He hid in his bosom away.

And he watched the dance till the clouds did gloom
  And the wind blew an angry tune:
One after one she caught up her comb,
  To the sea went dancin' doon.

But the fairest, wi' hair like the mune in a clud,
  She sought till she was the last.
He creepin' went and watchin' stud,
  And he thought to hold her fast.

She dropped at his feet without motion or heed;
  He took her, and home he sped.—
All day she lay like a withered sea-weed,
  On a purple and gowden bed.

But at night whan the wind frae the watery bars
  Blew into the dusky room,
She opened her een like twa settin' stars,
  And back came her twilight bloom.

The king's son knelt beside her bed:
  She was his ere a month had passed;
And the cold sea-maiden he had wed
  Grew a tender wife at last.

And all went well till her baby was born,
  And then she couldna sleep;
She would rise and wander till breakin' morn,
  Hark-harkin' the sound o' the deep.

One night when the wind was wailing about,
  And the sea was speckled wi' foam,
From room to room she went in and out
  And she came on her carven comb.

She twisted her hair with eager hands,
  She put in the comb with glee:
She 's out and she 's over the glittering sands,
  And away to the moaning sea.

One cry came back from far away:
  He woke, and was all alone.
Her night robe lay on the marble gray,
  And the cold sea-maiden was gone.

Ever and aye frae first peep o' the moon,
  Whan the wind blew aff o' the sea,
The desert shore still up and doon
  Heavy at heart paced he.

But never more came the maidens to play
  From the merry cold-hearted sea;
He heard their laughter far out and away,
  But heavy at heart paced he.

I have modernized the ballad—indeed spoiled it altogether, for I have made up this version from the

memory of it—with only, I fear, just a touch here and there of the original expression.

"That's what comes of taking what you have no right to," said Turkey, in whom the practical had ever the upper hand of the imaginative.

As we walked home together I resumed the subject.

"I think you're too hard on the king's son," I said. "He couldn't help falling in love with the mermaid."

"He had no business to steal her comb, and then run away with herself," said Turkey.

"She was none the worse for it," said I.

"Who told you that?" he retorted. "I don't think the girl herself would have said so. It's not every girl that would care to marry a king's son. She might have had a lover of her own down in the sea. At all events the prince was none the better for it."

"But the song says she made a tender wife," I objected.

"She couldn't help herself. She made the best of it. I daresay he wasn't a bad sort of a fellow, but he was no gentleman."

"Turkey!" I exclaimed. "He was a prince!"

"I know that."

"Then he must have been a gentleman."

"I don't know that. I've read of a good many princes who did things I should be ashamed to do."

"But you're not a prince, Turkey," I returned, in the low endeavour to bolster up the wrong with my silly logic.

"No. Therefore if I were to do what was rude and dishonest, people would say: 'What could you expect of a ploughboy?' A prince ought to be just so much better bred than a ploughboy. I would scorn to do what that prince did. What's wrong in a ploughboy can't be right in a prince, Ranald. Or else right is only right sometimes; so that right may be wrong and wrong may be right, which is as much as to say there is no right and wrong; and if there's no right and wrong, the world's an awful mess, and there can't be any God, for a God would never have made it like that."

"Well, Turkey, you know best. I can't help thinking the prince was not so much to blame, though."

"You see what came of it—misery."

"Perhaps he would rather have had the misery and all together than none of it."

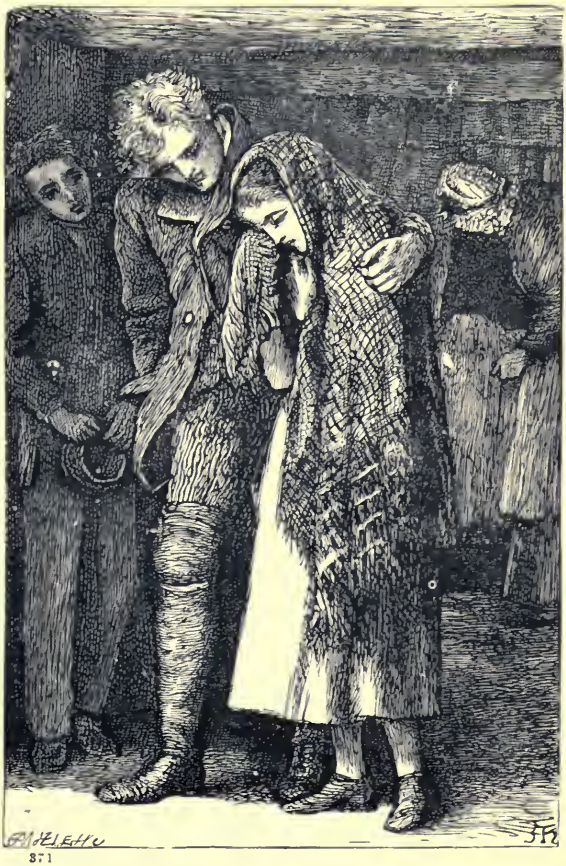
"That's for him to settle. But he must have seen he was wrong, before he had done wandering by the sea like that."

"Well now, Turkey, what would you have done yourself, suppose the beautifulest of them all had laid her comb down within an inch of where you were standing—and never saw you, you know?"

Turkey thought for a moment before answering.

"I'm supposing you fell in love with her at first sight, you know," I added.

"Well, I'm sure I should not have kept the comb, even if I had taken it just to get a chance of speaking



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THE DEATH OF ELSIE'S GRANDMOTHER.

to her. And I can't help fancying if he had behaved like a gentleman, and let her go without touching her the first time, she might have come again; and if he had married her at last of her own free will, she would not have run away from him, let the sea have kept calling her ever so much."

The next evening, I looked for Elsie as usual, but did not see her. How blank and dull the schoolroom seemed! Still she might arrive any moment. But she did not come. I went through my duties wearily, hoping ever for the hour of release. I could see well enough that Turkey was anxious too. The moment school was over, we hurried away, almost without a word, to the cottage. There we found her weeping. Her grandmother had died suddenly. She clung to Turkey, and seemed almost to forget my presence. But I thought nothing of that. Had the case been mine, I too should have clung to Turkey from faith in his help and superior wisdom.

There were two or three old women in the place. Turkey went and spoke to them, and then took Elsie home to his mother. Jamie was asleep, and they would not wake him.

How it was arranged, I forget, but both Elsie and Jamie lived for the rest of the winter with Turkey's mother. The cottage was let, and the cow taken home by their father. Before summer Jamie had got a place in a shop in the village, and then Elsie went back to her mother.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN EVENING VISIT.

I NOW saw much less of Elsie; but I went with Turkey, as often as I could, to visit her at her father's cottage. The evenings we spent there are amongst the happiest hours in my memory. One evening in particular appears to stand out as a type of the whole. I remember every point in the visit. I think it must have been almost the last. We set out as the sun was going down on an evening in the end of April, when the nightly frosts had not yet vanished. The hail was dancing about us as we started; the sun was disappearing in a bank of tawny orange cloud; the

night would be cold and dark and stormy; but we cared nothing for that: a conflict with the elements always added to the pleasure of any undertaking then. It was in the midst of another shower of hail, driven on the blasts of a keen wind, that we arrived at the little cottage. It had been built by Duff himself to receive his bride, and although since enlarged, was still a very little house. It had a foundation of stone, but the walls were of turf. He had lined it with boards, however, and so made it warmer and more comfortable than most of the labourers' dwellings. When we entered, a glowing fire of peat was on the hearth, and the pot with the supper hung over it. Mrs. Duff was spinning, and Elsie, by the light of a little oil lamp suspended against the wall, was teaching her youngest brother to read. Whatever she did, she always seemed in my eyes to do it better than any one else; and to see her under the lamp, with one arm round the little fellow who stood leaning against her, while the other hand pointed with a knitting-needle to the letters of the spelling-book which lay on her knee, was to see a lovely picture. The mother did not rise from her spinning, but spoke a kindly welcome, while Elsie got up, and without approaching us, or saying more than a word or two, set chairs for us by the fire, and took the little fellow away to put him to bed.

"It's a cold night," said Mrs. Duff. "The wind seems to blow through me as I sit at my wheel. I wish my husband would come home."

"He 'll be suppering his horses," said Turkey. "I 'll just run across and give him a hand, and that 'll bring him in the sooner."

"Thank you, Turkey," said Mrs. Duff as he vanished.

"He 's a fine lad," she remarked, much in the same phrase my father used when speaking of him.

"There 's nobody like Turkey," I said.

"Indeed, I think you 're right there, Ranald. A better-behaved lad doesn't step. He 'll do something to distinguish himself some day. I shouldn't wonder if he went to college, and wagged his head in a pulpit yet."

The idea of Turkey wagging his head in a pulpit made me laugh.

"Wait till you see," resumed Mrs. Duff, somewhat offended at my reception of her prophecy. "Folk will hear of him yet."

"I didn't mean he couldn't be a minister, Mrs. Duff. But I don't think he will take to that."

Here Elsie came back, and lifting the lid of the pot, examined the state of its contents. I got hold of her hand, but for the first time she withdrew it. I did not feel hurt, for she did it very gently. Then she began to set the white deal table in the middle of the floor, and by the time she had put the plates and spoons upon it, the water in the pot was boiling, and she began to make the porridge, at which she was judged to be first-rate—in my mind, equal to our Kirsty. By the time it was ready, her father and Turkey came in

James Duff said grace, and we sat down to our supper. The wind was blowing hard outside, and every now and then the hail came in deafening rattles against the little windows, and, descending the wide chimney, danced on the floor about the hearth; but not a thought of the long, stormy way between us and home interfered with the enjoyment of the hour.

After supper, which was enlivened by simple chat about the crops and the doings on the farm, James turned to me, and said:

"Haven't you got a song or a ballad to give us, Ranald? I know you're always getting hold of such things."

I had expected this; for, every time I went, I tried to have something to repeat to them. As I could not sing, this was the nearest way in which I might contribute to the evening's entertainment. Elsie was very fond of ballads, and I could hardly please her better than by bringing a new one with me. But in default of that, an old one or a story would be welcomed. My reader must remember that there were very few books to be had then in that part of the country, and therefore any mode of literature was precious. The schoolmaster was the chief source from which I derived my provision of this sort. On the present occasion, I was prepared with a ballad of his. I remember every word of it now, and will give it to my readers, reminding them once more how easy it is to skip it, if they do not care for that kind of thing.

"Bonny lassie, rosy lassie,
Ken ye what is care?
Had ye ever a thought, lassie,
Made yer hertie sair?"

Johnnie said it, Johnnie luikin'
Into Jeannie's face;
Seekin' in the garden hedge
For an open place.

"Na," said Jeannie, saftly smilin',
"Nought o' care ken I;
For they say the carlin'
Is better passit by."

"Licht o' hert ye are, Jeannie,
As o' foot and han'!
Lang be yours sic answer
To ony spierin' man."

"I ken what ye wad hae, sir,
Though yer words are few;
Ye wad hae me aye as careless,
Till I care for you."

"Dinna mock me, Jeannie, lassi
Wi' yer lauchin' ee;
For ye hae nae notion
What gaes on in me."

"No more I hae a notion
O' what's in yonder cairn;
I'm no sae pryin', Johnnie,
It's none o' my concern."

"Well, there's ae thing, Jeannie,
Ye canna help, my doo—
Ye canna help me carin'
Wi' a' my hert for you."

Johnnie turned and left her,
Listed for the war;
In a year cam' limpin'
Hame wi' mony a scar.

Wha was that was sittin'
Wan and worn wi' care?
Could it be his Jeannie
Aged and alter'd sair?

Her goon was black, her eelids
Reid wi' sorrow's dew:
Could she in a twalmonth
Be wife and widow too?

Jeannie's hert gaed wallop,
Ken't him whan he spak':
"I thocht that ye was deid, Johnnie.
Is 't yersel' come back?"

"O Jeannie, are ye, tell me,
Wife or widow or baith?
To see ye lost as I am,
I wad be verra laith."

"I canna be a widow
That wife was never nane;
But gin ye will hae me,
Noo I will be ane."

His crutch he flang it frae him,
Forgetful o' war's harms;
But couldna stan' withoot it,
And fell in Jeannie's arms.

"That 's not a bad ballad," said James Duff. "Have you a tune it would go to, Elsie?"

Elsie thought a little, and asked me to repeat the

first verse. Then she sung it out clear and fair to a tune I had never heard before.

"That will do splendidly, Elsie," I said. "I will write it out for you, and then you will be able to sing it all the next time I come."

She made me no answer. She and Turkey were looking at each other, and did not hear me. James Duff began to talk to me. Elsie was putting away the supper-things. In a few minutes I missed her and Turkey, and they were absent for some time. They did not return together, but first Turkey, and Elsie some minutes after. As the night was now getting quite stormy, James Duff counselled our return, and we obeyed. But little either Turkey or I cared for wind or hail.

I saw Elsie at church most Sundays; but she was far too attentive and modest ever to give me even a look. Sometimes I had a word with her when we came out, but my father expected us to walk home with him; and I generally saw Turkey walk away with her.

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TURKEY AND ELSIE COMING FROM CHURCH.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A BREAK IN MY STORY.

I AM now rapidly approaching the moment at which I said I should bring this history to an end—the moment, namely, when I became aware that my boyhood was behind me.

I left home this summer for the first time, and followed my brother Tom to the grammar-school in the county-town, in order afterwards to follow him to the university. There was so much of novelty and expectation in the change, that I did not feel the separation from my father and the rest of my family much at first. That came afterwards. For the time, the pleasure of a long ride on the top of the mail-coach, with a bright sun and a pleasant breeze, the various incidents connected with changing horses and starting afresh, and then the outlook for the first peep of the sea, occupied my attention too thoroughly.

I do not care to dwell on my experience at the grammar-school. I worked fairly, and got on; but whether I should gain a scholarship remained doubtful enough. Before the time for the examination arrived,

I went to spend a week at home. It was a great disappointment to me that I had to return again without seeing Elsie. But it could not be helped. The only Sunday I had there was a stormy day, late in October, and Elsie had a bad cold, as Turkey informed me, and could not be out; while my father had made so many engagements for me, that, with one thing and another, I was not able to go and see her.

Turkey was now doing a man's work on the farm, and stood as high as ever in the estimation of my father and everyone who knew him. He was as great a favourite with Allister and Davie as with myself, and took very much the same place with the former as he had taken with me. I had lost nothing of my regard for him, and he talked to me with the same familiarity as before, urging me to diligence and thoroughness in my studies, pressing upon me that no one had ever done lasting work, "that is," Turkey would say—"work that goes to the making of the world," without being in earnest as to the *what* and conscientious as to the *how*.

"I don't want you to try to be a great man," he said once. "You might succeed, and then find out you had failed altogether."

"How could that be, Turkey?" I objected. "A body can't succeed and fail both at once."

"A body might succeed," he replied, "in doing what he wanted to do, and then find out that it was not in the least what he had thought it."

"What rule are you to follow, then, Turkey?" I asked.

"Just the rule of duty," he replied. "What you ought to do, that you must do. Then when a choice comes, not involving duty, you know, choose what you like best."

This is the substance of what he said. If any one thinks it pedantic, I can only say, he would not have thought so if he had heard it as it was uttered—in the homely forms and sounds of the Scottish tongue.

"Aren't you fit for something better than farm-work yourself, Turkey?" I ventured to suggest, foolishly impelled, I suppose, to try whether I could not give advice too.

"It's *my* work," said Turkey, in a decisive tone, which left me no room for rejoinder.

This conversation took place in the barn, where Turkey happened to be thrashing alone that morning. In turning the sheaf, or in laying a fresh one, there was always a moment's pause in the din, and then only we talked, so that our conversation was a good deal broken. I had buried myself in the straw, as in days of old, to keep myself warm, and there I lay and looked at Turkey while he thrashed, and thought with myself that his face had grown much more solemn than it used to be. But when he smiled, which was seldom, all the old merry sweetness dawned again. This was the last long talk I ever had with him. The next day I returned for the examination, was happy enough to

gain a small scholarship, and entered on my first winter at college.

My father wrote to me once a week or so, and occasionally I had a letter with more ink than matter in it from one of my younger brothers. Tom was now in Edinburgh, in a lawyer's office. I had no correspondence with Turkey. Mr. Wilson wrote to me sometimes, and along with good advice would occasionally send me some verses, but he told me little or nothing of what was going on.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

I LEARN THAT I AM NOT A MAN.

IT was a Saturday morning, very early in April, when I climbed the mail-coach to return to my home for the summer; for so the university year is divided in Scotland. The sky was bright, with great fleecy clouds sailing over it, from which now and then fell a shower in large drops. The wind was keen, and I had to wrap myself well in my cloak. But my heart was light, and full of the pleasure of ended and successful labour, of home-going, and the signs which sun and sky gave that the summer was at hand.

Five months had gone by since I last left home, and it had seemed such an age to Davie, that he burst out crying when he saw me. My father received me with a certain still tenderness, which seemed to grow upon him. Kirsty followed Davie's example, and Allister, without saying much, haunted me like my shadow. I saw nothing of Turkey that evening.

In the morning we went to church, of course, and I sat beside the reclining stone warrior, from whose face age had nearly worn the features away. I gazed at

him all the time of the singing of the first psalm, and there grew upon me a strange solemnity, a sense of the passing away of earthly things, and a stronger conviction than I had ever had of the need of something that could not pass. This feeling lasted all the time of the service, and increased while I lingered in the church almost alone until my father should come out of the vestry.

I stood in the passage, leaning against the tomb. A cloud came over the sun, and the whole church grew dark as a December day—gloomy and cheerless. I heard for some time, almost without hearing them, two old women talking together close by me. The pulpit was between them and me, but when I became thoroughly aware of their presence, I peeped round and saw them.

"And when did it nappen, said you?" asked one of them, whose head moved with an incessant capricious motion from palsy.

"About two o'clock this morning," answered the other, who leaned on a stick, almost bent double with rheumatism. "I saw their next-door neighbour this morning, and he had seen Jamie, who goes home of a Saturday night, you know; but William being a Seceder, nobody 's been to tell the minister, and I 'm just waiting to let him know; for she was a great favourite of his, and he 's been to see her often. They 're much to be pitied—poor people! Nobody thought it would come so sudden like. When I saw

her mother last, there was no such notion in her head."

Before I could ask of whom they were talking, my father came up the aisle from the vestry, and stopped to speak to the old women.

"Elsie Duff's gone, poor thing!" said the rheumatic one.

I grew stupid. What followed I have forgotten. A sound was in my ears, and my body seemed to believe it, though my soul could not comprehend it. When I came to myself I was alone in the church. They had gone away without seeing me. I was standing beside the monument, leaning on the carved Crusader. The sun was again shining, and the old church was full of light. But the sunshine had changed to me, and I felt very mournful. I should see the sweet face, hear the lovely voice, no more in this world. I endeavoured to realize the thought, but could not, and I left the church hardly conscious of anything but a dull sense of loss.

I found my father very grave. He spoke tenderly of Elsie; but he did not know how I had loved her, and I could not make much response. I think, too, that he said less than he otherwise would, from the fear of calling back to my mind too vivid a memory of how ill I had once behaved to her. It was, indeed, my first thought the moment he uttered her name, but it soon passed, for much had come between.

In the evening I went up to the farm to look for

Turkey, who had not been at church morning or afternoon. He was the only one I could talk to about Elsie. I found him in one of the cow-houses, bedding the cows. His back was towards me when I entered.

"Turkey," I said.

He looked round with a slow mechanical motion, as if with a conscious effort of the will. His face was so white, and wore such a look of loss, that it almost terrified me like the presence of something awful. I stood speechless. He looked at me for a moment, and then came slowly up to me, and laid his hand on my shoulder.

"Ranald," he said, "we were to have been married next year."

Before the grief of the man, mighty in its silence, my whole being was humbled. I knew my love was not so great as his. It grew in my eyes a pale and feeble thing; and I felt worthless in the presence of her dead, whom alive I had loved with peaceful gladness. Elsie belonged to Turkey, and he had lost her, and his heart was breaking. I threw my arms round him, and wept for him, not for myself. It was thus I ceased to be a boy.

Here, therefore, my story ends. Before I returned to the university, Turkey had enlisted and left the place.

My father's half-prophecy concerning him is now fulfilled. He is a general. I will not tell his name. For some reason or other he had taken his mother's,

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AT ELSIE'S GRAVE.

and by that he is well known. I have never seen him, or heard from him, since he left my father's service; but I am confident that if ever we meet, it will be as old and true friends.

THE END.

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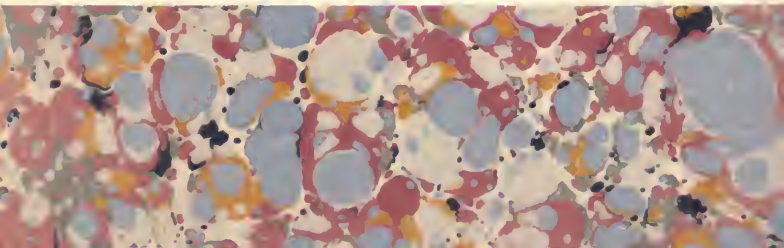

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